

# Magister-Auctor Saga



The privilege of knowing

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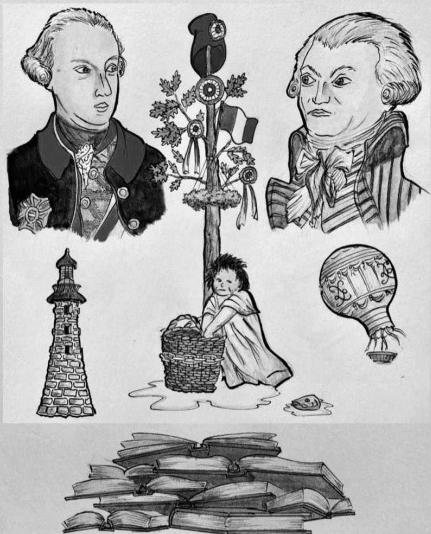
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# Magister-Auctor Saga



The privilege of knowing

Birn Pham

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*To Manuel, Sebastião  
and Olívia*



## The library at the Kaaistraat

It's cold, very cold, that November of 1775. Jan and Madeleine have placed the two groups of children under their care in adjacent rooms of the library. A coal stove provides the necessary warmth to prevent numb fingers for those writing. In the larger of the two rooms, there's a fireplace with a small fire burning. A large kettle of water is steaming gently. Jan will soon be serving hot cocoa, sweetened with rock candy, to anyone who wants it.

The youngest children receive help from older classmates to read the simple sentences beneath the illustrations from Comenius's children's encyclopedia. Madeleine, with another group, goes through some texts she has translated and adapted from one of Émilie de Châtelet's books. She encourages the older children to share their favourite reading. Afterward, she asks them to write a short summary of their story. Jean-Jacques is present that afternoon. He watches with fascination as his mother encourages the children to reason. Afterward, he offers to offer advice and suggest words if one or another student is having difficulty writing the summary.

Towards the end of the afternoon, a third group entered the library. Jan and Madeleine have been working with Karel and Tiene for ten years. The couple and the children they accompanied had just completed a brisk walk that took them beyond the city gates. They avoided the excavation work near Kaaistraat. Construction began there last year on the new docks, which currently makes this part of the city dangerous for young children. But they did walk near the newly built lighthouse on their way to the fortified dike and the beach between Oostende and Mariakerke. There they spent some time collecting shells. On their return, they visited Jozef Pieterszoon, from whom Uncle Johannes buys fish, just as his father in times did from his father, Pieter Janszoon. Jozef, of course,

knows a lot about the shells the children showed him and helps them learn to identify them.

Back in Kaaistraat, they agree that the older children will draw pictures of the shells, labeling them with their names, and that the entire group will collectively lay a shell carpet on a clay base. Mussels, oysters, cockles, a few razor shells and other clams, such as nuns, sand and mud clams, banded wedge shell, and two carpet shells are given their artistic uses. They bordered the whole thing with periwinkles, spiny snails, and four whelks, one in each corner of the arrangement.

After the children have put away their work materials and finished their cocoa drink, they leave the library and go out in small groups, heading home.

The schoolhouse now has sixty-two students. Forty-three of them pay tuition. The children of fishermen and other poor artisans are free. However, a small contribution often arrives in the form of fresh fish or shellfish, and occasionally a parent brings freshly cut clay or peat. Jan and Madeleine show how much they appreciate these donations, which benefit the small school community. Nevertheless, they always make it clear that the children are welcome even without donations. They have the right to acquire the knowledge that the library and the cooperative work make available.

The four adults continue to chat and decide how to end the week. After all, the day after tomorrow is Sunday, and the schoolhouse is closed.

“I’m very happy with the use of Émilie’s adapted texts,” begins Madeleine. “The children have no trouble with them, and it’s interesting to see how some of them can already reason quite well. We’ll have to use some clay to recreate the falling spheres experiment.”

“One of the boys asked yesterday why the water doesn’t fall out of the bucket when you turn it on a string,” Jan remarks. “Karel, do

you have a chance to talk to the older ones about Newton's rules or laws? I think you can do that better than I can."

"I'll take care of that," Karel answers. "And I have an idea that might interest you. Tiene too, by the way. When the children on the outing earlier asked Jozef about the shells, I thought it might be interesting to have them talk to other adults about their activities. That would complement the texts that describe the different professions in *A World of Sensual Pictures*, what do you think?"

"We can then compile a booklet ourselves based on what we hear, with texts that connect with the world of many of our students," Tiene begins. "I think this kind of reading material is more interesting than the sometimes outdated performances from *Orbis*, no matter how hard we try to adapt the reading texts."

Jan and Madeleine are quite fond of that idea. "In the end," says Jan, "the teaching staff of the *Trap der Jeugd* [*Staircase of Youth*] thought about the same thing with a different content. In the Northern Netherlands, they are adapting the Frisian 'Trap' for other cities"

"Do you have any other news from Sluis?" asks Karel.

"Not about the schoolmaster my grandparents stayed with, when they were forced to leave Oostende in 1745. The city schoolmaster at the time was Johannes de Vos, and he probably knew where my grandparents stayed. But he died a few years after their stay there. The current city schoolmaster couldn't help us any further. He put us in touch with the oldest assistant teachers, but they were all appointed later. Our correspondence was very cordial, though. We agreed to keep each other informed about developments related to the school."

"Did I just see Jean-Jacques?" Tiene asks. "I thought he'd already left."

"We've finally found a family in Leuven where he can stay. He's leaving next week," Madeleine replies. "We hope everything goes smoothly. He can travel with one of the Ingalets, who has to go to

Brussels on business. He'll then continue from Brussels to Leuven alone, but that's going smoothly. He can cover the last part of the journey by carriage along the Brussels-Leuven-Tienen paved way."

"So you're letting Jean-Jacques go to Leuven after all," Karel observes. "I heard not long ago that the increasingly apparent malaise in France resulting from the King's absolutist tendencies is also a frequent topic of discussion there. Although our Maria Theresa also likes to keep a tight rein on things, and sometimes angers the clergy in doing so, she seems to use more diplomacy in her relations with the nobility and wealthy citizens in our regions. And she has certainly made herself popular among the Ostend residents. But I think the House of Habsburg would also have a harder time here if it were to interfere too much with the freedoms of corporations, crafts, and guilds. Didn't your parents write from Lille that inevitably changes are coming? If I remember correctly, they say that the petty nobility, the nobility of office, and the rich manufactories are stirring up the discontent, using figures like Voltaire or Rousseau to illustrate it?"

What Karel says is perhaps correct. Furthermore, one can sense the discontent of the poor almost everywhere, not so much because of the concentration of power by the reigning princes, but rather as a result of the great difficulties of daily life. Spectacle, of course, distracts the people from their constant worries. A visit from the princes and the associated festivities are always a welcome change in the difficult lives of the poor. Although rebels do raise awareness, few understand that levied taxes and tributes pay for these festivities and thus, directly or indirectly, keep their meagre wages low.

Moreover, any economic speculation on natural phenomena plays an additional disastrous role. For example, since 1770, both the Southern and Northern Netherlands have been experiencing shortages of milk and buttermilk due to persistent outbreaks of

cattle plague. Meanwhile, the price of grain has risen. In the south, it has long been customary to replace milk and buttermilk boiled with grain or buckwheat with potatoes. This has also become the case in the North, including in Friesland. This, in turn, has led to the Frisians consuming their own harvest. The resulting export ban temporarily caused a potato shortage in the Austrian Netherlands until 1773.

To make things even worse, the upper middle class, who had long regarded the potato with disdain, are increasingly incorporating it into their cuisine. This drives up the price. Recipes abound today. The Lemaître family and their friends often use Knoop's 1769 book, in which he describes all edible plants and their preparation. A large chapter is devoted to the potato. The suggested preparations leave no doubt that these are recipes for those with means. Poor people can only manage the more basic preparations. These might be potato pies, which are the only meal of the day. Or potatoes in their own cooking liquid with a little mace or marjoram, and salt and pepper when possible. The book includes more luxurious recipes using beef, lamb, or mutton. Potatoes and possibly other vegetables are then added to the meat stewed in broth when it is almost cooked.

If they had the book and able to read, even the less well-off might occasionally contemplate floured, sliced, half-cooked potatoes, browned in butter with bacon and onions. But potatoes with haddock in a butter sauce with parsley or mustard are clearly not for everyone. Fishermen serve stockfish with their potatoes.

Among the Lemaîtres, popular recipes include potato fries or pancakes made with sliced boiled potatoes, sprinkled with pepper, ginger, marjoram, or garlic. But the soufflé, prepared over hot coals, is especially popular, made with mashed boiled potatoes and an equal number of eggs, salt, and spices. And schoolchildren are fond of the potato cakes they are occasionally served. These consist of cold, mashed boiled potatoes, wheat, or barley flour. Water or milk

is stirred into this mixture, along with eggs, salt, and spices. The cake shapes, formed with a ladle, are then placed in a hot pan or baked under a copper lid with a flame.

Jan and Madeleine are happy to live in Oostende. In *Belgium Austriacum* the family doesn't feel threatened by the unrest prevailing in France. And they're not alone, as is clear from Karel's comments. The schoolhouse appeals to the parents who send their children there. Every year, they have to choose who to accept. The composition of the groups is determined by the ratio of girls to boys, but also by the ratio of those who are poor or better off. There are no truly wealthy people in Oostende. Keeping the school open is only possible because the family has income from previous investments made by John Lesmeister. Johannes, Maria, and Dieudonné later adjusted these investments, meandering through successive wars that create and make disappear economic societies. The two teaching pairs are happy that they are no longer alone in questioning spelling-based lessons in preparation for reading. Although many places are far from ready for the meaningful texts that support drawn pictures, there is a growing awareness that memorising simple letters is too abstract for children. The "hoornplankje" (horn board) and the "Haneboek" (Rooster Book) are increasingly facing competition from more comprehensive ABC books.

The correspondents from the Netherlands discuss a fairly recent report by schoolmasters, in preparation for the new school regulations in Zierikzee. Among other things, it states that spelling and reading are poorly suited to the subsequently adopted method of learning to write. The children may draw beautiful letters, but with *such a corrupt spelling that their writings are ridiculous and cannot be read by the most intelligent people, examples of which come before our eyes every day to the considerable detriment of the citizenry and the shame of such writers'*.

Proposals are emerging to teach letters using figures and texts that help children recognise the sound and shape of the letter, such as “*De hoepels (hoops) van Koos en Toon vallen in de sloot. OO, wat een schrik!*”.

But neither couple dwells solely on the dangers of spelling. Regarding their general perspective, Jan writes to his father: ‘*Well, there are thoughts about a more efficient way to teach children to read. But we still can't talk about universal education, with the same attention for poor and rich children, or with the same attention for boys and girls. Both here and in our northern neighbours, there's a significant distinction between boys and girls in the city-run schools. The latter are only required to acquire reading proficiency, which can be achieved at the Kleine School (Little School). Furthermore, they learn knitting and sewing instead of writing and arithmetic. Schools that don't comply with this can even be fined. From our correspondence with the local city schoolmaster, we know that in Sluis, in the 1750s, female schoolmistresses who didn't comply with this rule were fined up to 50 guilders. Mathilde heard from female colleagues that in several cities, even today, older schoolmasters are still responsible for monitoring these regulations. Several municipalities do announce that the city Kleine School is mixed for boys and girls, but they don't learn the same thing there. Our approach of offering the same lessons to boys and girls, to the poor and the rich, is, as far as we know, rather rare.*

*It is abundantly clear, dear father, that there is a vast difference between the ambitions of humanists or the proclaimed policies of rulers who claim to be open to the Enlightenment, and reality. Municipalities allocate far too little money to build decent schools. Poor schools, like those in Oostende, are often little more than orphanages. They bear a striking resemblance to child prisons and serve to provide cheap young labor to factories and workshops that attract an increasing number of workers.*

*People are kept in ignorance, simply to prevent them from acquiring the privilege of science and possessing knowledge that can undermine power*

*relations. This also prevents them from considering the difference between natural science and dogma. Far too few people are aware of Newton's work. Few understand what scholars have published over the last hundred years. The illiterate public has only a vague idea of what learning is. Literate people understand the importance of the Royal Academy, which they gratefully use themselves, but prefer not to face excessive competition. Few of them advocate for education in general; many remain in their own world of advantages.'*

Jan and Madeleine weren't at all surprised when Jean-Jacques expressed his desire to leave home and make Leuven his permanent residence. They wrote to their friends, Duchamp. They were peers they knew from Lille and whose parents often attended Jan's dinners. The couple moved to Leuven the same year Jan and Madeleine moved to Oostende. Duchamp was able to start working at the university library. In Leuven, education is primarily provided to boarders from one of the four university's Pedagogies. But their friends advised Jean-Jacques against boarding school. They thought the offer from Pedagogy De Valk would appeal to him most. After all, it has several young teachers, including Jan Pieter Minckelers, who also studied there after graduating from *Latin School* at the age of fifteen. The teaching in this Pedagogy primarily focuses on new knowledge in the natural sciences, but Jean-Jacques would also find something to his liking if his interests lie in human philosophy. Duchamp approached the director of the Pedagogy and arranged for Jean-Jacques to live with them. They live in the same street as De Valk.

Shortly after Jean-Jacques settled in Leuven, he wrote an enthusiastic letter to his parents. He enthusiastically shared his first impressions of the teachers, who were experimenting and discussing their experiments, even with the younger students.

Jean-Jacques also meets Elise Duchamp. Her parents tell both young people that it's actually a renewed introduction, as they met

several times as toddlers at Jean-Jacques' grandparents' house in Lille. The two, only a year apart, get along well. Jean-Jacques is eager to share everything he learns at the university with Elise. When he's not in the university library, he and Elise can be found in Duchamp's personal library. There, they use his lessons as a basis for further self-study. Jean-Jacques knows from his grandmother and mother that the privilege of knowing is not reserved for men, despite the fact that almost all universities continue to ban women from their buildings and classrooms.

So it was that since Jan and Madeleine moved to Oostende, they spent for the first time the Christmas holidays without their son. December brought a lot of snow, and January 1776 also remained cold. At the end of the month, Ostend harbour was completely frozen over. Ships could barely get in or out. On New Year's Eve, an unusually large crowd gathered on the dike to watch two fishing boats struggle through the ice. Binoculars and viewing tubes were passed from hand to hand, observing the fishing boats' turbulent journey.

At the beginning of February, Jean-Jacques writes that temperatures below freezing were recorded in Brussels at sixteen and seventeen degrees Réaumur, while in Leuven on February 1st, it was still 16 degrees below zero. An acquaintance of Duchamp's father, arriving from Namur, tells that the Meuse was so frozen there that you could walk across it for days.

In mid-February, Jozef Pieterszoon visits the school at Kaaistraat. Jan has asked him if he'd like to talk to a group of children about the lighthouse. Jozef enters one of the library rooms somewhat shyly. Two clay models are exposed on a table. On one of the towers lie a few small pieces of coal, and on the other, a piece of glass represents the light mirror.

Jozef sits down on the chair that was set up for him and explains: "To bring the ships safely into the harbour, the helmsmen must

know exactly where to direct them. When the weather is good, they can clearly see where to go. But as you know, the North Sea is often dark because of clouds, storms, or fog. It also happens that ships don't return on time or simply want to enter at night. And in winter, it gets dark early, doesn't it? Well, Empress Maria Theresa, who is always kind to our city, gave permission five years ago to build a tower with boxes at the top where you can keep a coal fire. And on October 15, 1772, we were able to put our tower into use, after the inauguration, which was also attended by Master Arnold Hoys. Now, you've surely noticed that there's a little house under the lighthouse for the keeper, who has to tend the fire. And that fire can be dangerous. A coal fire crackles and sputters, and when there's a strong wind, the embers fly everywhere. The roof of The cottage has already caught fire. It's not always safe to be close by, especially in windy and foggy conditions, when the fire is being stoked. Just try keeping a glowing coal fire going when it's pouring rain. So, it's been decided to take a different approach by September. Then oil lamps will provide the light instead of coal. That's why they need light mirrors so the light from the oil lamp can be seen further out to sea. I say September because the new docks will also be ready by the end of this year.

Both the children and the teachers greatly appreciate these short lessons and information provided by outsiders. Madeleine and Tiene often create a drawing commemorating the visit, and Karel and Jan then create a short text, with a selection of words from the text underneath to emphasise the spelling of certain vowels or consonants. The drawing and text are glued to a small wooden board, and in this way, the school gradually collects a number of stories that appeal to the children and help them improve and accelerate their reading skills. This year, in addition to the lighthouse, boards have been added for the summer months about ships, fishing, bread baking, Oostende's churches, and types of horses.

The days pass, and as spring progresses, fishing activity increases. There's also more work in the fields of the polders. As every year, all of this has an impact on the school's activities. Children from the least affluent families are absent more often. Their parents put them to work to supplement the family income. During this period, one of the four teachers is usually available on Sundays for parents and children who wish to attend Sunday school.

At the end of May, Jan is on Sunday duty. The three other friends are checking texts for possible later use. During a short break, Madeleine remarks: "We're like some kind of little *Order of the Perfectibles*."

"What is this now?" Karel wonders.

Madeleine laughs: "Something I recently heard from our northern neighbours. But the idea actually originated in regions further south. In Bavaria, a society was founded to protect the literature and teachings of the Enlightenment. It is known as *Order of the Perfectibles*, or  *Illuminati*."

"The literature and teachings of the Enlightenment," Tiene notes.

"That could mean anything. Do you know more?"

"Not much. I was told the group consists of students and young teachers. They believe that science is a good thing for everyone as long as dogma and esotericism are eliminated from education. They oppose, among other things, the influence of the Jesuits or others with other strong religious influences on education. But they also advocate against the superstition and obscurantism that dominate public life when ignorance prevails. In this way, they also want to counter the abuse of power by the state."

"That won't make them popular in many circles," says Karel. "We see every day how ignorance plays into the hands of those who want to safeguard their power."

"In my opinion, the big weak point of the  *Illuminati* is they act like a secret society, a bit like the Freemasons. They oppose esotericism but exhibit esoteric behaviour themselves. No one knows exactly

who they are. The obvious reason is probably to protect their members from aggression and persecution, but it's precisely that secrecy that creates room for false stories to be told about the group. Moreover, as in any secret group, less empathetic members can quickly position themselves as superior to outsiders, since they claim to possess Science —Truth, so to speak — while others do not. If a governor, a church leader, or even a municipal council thinks one of the goals of the *Illuminati* could be to put an end to the machinations of those who perpetuate injustice, then one can expect swift reactions even from those who claim to wish to rule without dominating them," Madeleine continues.

"It is of course nice to know that there is still a group that remembers *Res Publica Litteraria*, but I see, like you, the risk that one or other member of the society will want to take charge and develop a kind of despotism of his own," Tiene thinks.

"Perhaps things won't go that far with despotism; it all depends on how the group members treat and regard each other. A new kind of corporatism, like that of crafts and guilds, could also emerge. And the development of such a form of corporatism among thinkers and philosophers doesn't seem very healthy to me. How does such a community ensure that everyone can be *Illuminati*? That always remains the question, since the beginning of the cultural era," Karel concludes, after which he asks Jan, who enters the room: "Madeleine was just talking to us about the *Illuminati*, what is your idea?"

"I don't know what you were talking about earlier, but I did hear your last comment. And I cherish my dream that the children we work with, precisely through our approach, can all access the common Science and Knowledge. Knowledge shouldn't be a privilege; it should become a universal right, right?" Jan replies.

"Did you hear the news at the harbour?" With that question Karel and Tiene enter Jan and Madeleine's house.

“Are there any difficulties with the excavation work?” asks Jan.

“That’s not news, that’s everyday fare,” laughs Tiene.

“No,” says Karel, “The news arrived by ship. The British colonists in America have declared that they will make the territories they occupy independent of the British Crown.”

“Do I understand correctly?” asks Madeleine. “The descendants of the British who murdered or expelled the local population in the name of the British Crown are now saying they no longer recognise the British Sovereign as their lord?”

Karel looks at Madeleine for a long time. Then he says, “That’s an interesting way of looking at things. You’re essentially saying they’re declaring themselves a new local population. I think it mainly has to do with property. I think those who enrich themselves there no longer want to pay taxes to a distant European monarch.”

“The naval officers we just spoke with were talking about the cargo they’ll be transporting to the rebels in the American states. There’s a lot of war material among them. It looks like we’ll be hearing about another war soon, this time between old and new owners,” Tiene adds.

“Are those overseas Brits planning to build their own kingdom?” asks Jan.

“You can only speculate about that at this point. Let’s try to find out more in the coming weeks and months,” Karel replies.

Now that classes are suspended for the summer, the friends have some free time. Today, the beautiful weather invites them to take a walk along the dike, dunes, and beach. Equipped with the necessary sun hats and parasols, the foursome sets out. When they arrive at the beach, west of the lighthouse, they can see for themselves what they’d already heard. Sea bathing is permitted again this year. Bathing itself is increasingly seen as normal, now that science shows it doesn’t damage the skin and that those who bathe

regularly suffer fewer ailments. But many conflicting stories circulate about sea bathing in particular. According to some physicians, bathing in salt water offers only health benefits. They even recommend drinking the seawater. Other physicians, on the other hand, believe that bathing in water other than spring water has disadvantages. Fishermen, who sometimes take unwanted sea baths professionally, find the idea of throwing themselves into the waves of their own free will rather strange. Well, in the waves... You can hardly call waves at the beach's edge these last week. From a distance, the foursome watches some young people splashing around in the water. Jan notes that once bathing becomes more popular, comments about its immorality will likely emerge rather than its health benefits. The others laugh and admit that the naked bodies in the pulpit might be dismissed as scandalous.

Over the next few days, the four review Madeleine's notes. She's used the school break to organize her research in Jan's grandparents' library and in the information from her correspondence. She wants to map out some of human cultural activity between 1750 and the present day. Her primary goal is to paint a picture of what she calls the acceleration of events and the accumulation of knowledge. The four agree they can glean a great deal of information from Madeleine's compendium to create new reading materials for their older students. They compile the most striking developments in astronomy, mathematics, botany, zoology, and medicine. They also highlight some of the consequences of research and discoveries.

Karel believes it's very important to talk about the heavens and their observations. He suggests briefly discussing Kant. In 1754, Kant claimed to be able to mathematically prove that the speed at which the Earth orbits the Sun gradually slightly decreases. Jan also believes that connecting mathematics with astronomy is useful. They could highlight Halley's observations, whose calculations

predicted that the comet he observed in 1705 would reappear in 1758, which subsequently proved to be true. Furthermore, the four should discuss observations and calculations that predict the apparent motions of the stars relative to the Earth in its annual orbit around the Sun. Tiene believes it's worthwhile to discuss Charles Messier's observations of a spiral of stars in the *Canes Venatici* to show to the older children. She thinks it is also useful to briefly discuss the rivalry between astronomers. She gives the example of how Elert Bode, according to his own account, recorded an observation of another spiral of stars in *Ursus Maior*. He gave it the name *Bode Constellation*. Then Charles Messier claimed to have discovered that spiral (1).

Jan believes that the year 1759 should be mentioned in the overview of progress in mathematics because of the posthumous publication of Émilie de Châtelet's translation of Newton's *Principia*. He further proposes to mention Euler on the occasion of his publications on differential calculus in 1755. According to Karel, the name of Lambert should not be omitted, who proved in 1761 that *pi* cannot be determined precisely, although the number represents the ratio of the circle's radius to its circumference for each circle drawn. He finds it helpful to introduce this when reviewing the basics of geometry with children and having them draw circles with string and chalk or charcoal.

Tiene and Madeleine are eager to devote more attention to the plant and animal world now that Linnaeus began his systematic plant classification in 1753 and also introduced his taxonomy for the animal world in 1758. Such a system makes it easy to incorporate new species, as was recently the case for the polar bear and the ivory gull after the Phipps Arctic Expedition of 1773.

Both women rediscovered the work with botanical illustrations by Elizabeth Blackwell, who died in 1758, in the library, alongside books by Maria Sibylla Merian. The books apparently survived the family's travels from Amsterdam to Oostende via Frankfurt and

Cologne.

Naturally, the foursome often talks about seafaring with the children. This includes stories about illnesses on board and how the sailors had long ago learned that eating potatoes could help. Madeleine has now gone through a copy of *Examen chymique des pommes de terres [Chemical examination of potatoes]* published in Paris in 1774 by pharmacist Antoine Parmentier. This work further established the potato among a wider segment of the population.

But both women are especially excited about *theoria Generationis* from 1759 by Casper Wolff with which he developed the theory of *epigenese*. They find it very interesting that a foetus is not a miniature adult specimen, but a developing being. This provides greater support for those seeking a scientific explanation for the individuality of the person, the uniqueness of humans, and their connection with the animal and plant world. It is, of course, also an interesting hypothesis to refute the idea that God created humans in his own image.

The care of pregnant women has improved significantly in just one generation. Childbirth still carries significant risks for both mother and child, but today there are more midwives with specialised training. This is, of course, especially true in the cities. In the countryside, assistance still comes primarily from neighbours who gained experience from previous deliveries. However, research on childbirth wasn't conducted only in Bologna. In 1758, Angélique du Coudray began a two-month training program for future midwives. Her manual *Abrégé de l'art des accouchements* has been published in the Flemish region since 1775 under the title *Onderwys voor de leerlingen in de vroedkunde ofte konst der kinderbedden [Education for students in midwifery or the art of childcare]*.

The last twenty-five years have seen even more important new developments in medicine. After establishing that variolation often offered protection against the fatal outcome of smallpox, Francis Home started to investigate in 1758 whether he could create a

similar protection against measles, which is fatal for many young children. In 1774, Edward Jenner, quite by chance, discovered a safer method for protecting people against smallpox instead of the variolation he, like every other physician, used. He investigated the peasant story that those who have had cowpox will not get smallpox. Cowpox is an infection in cows with few consequences, except for a few blisters on the udder. Jenner became aware of the work Geert Reinders was doing in the Northern Netherlands on inoculation against rinderpest. Dairymaids often had cowpox, and when one of them consulted Jenner, he saw an opportunity to test his theory. He infected James, the gardener's son, with the dairymaid's cowpox. After being slightly ill, James recovered within a week. Jenner describes the procedure as *inoculation with vaccinia*. When he subsequently performs a variolation on James, he no longer responds. Apparently, infection with the relatively benign cowpox can prevent infection with smallpox.

The foursome agrees to include a few short stories in the curriculum with reading texts, discussing the importance of washing and checking for parasites like fleas and lice, and also sharing knowledge about what doctors are capable of these days. This can help prevent some dangerous diseases.

The four teachers then consider the new insights into the Earth's history. They find it interesting to describe the planet's history in a short text, using the four geological periods proposed by Giovanni Arduino in 1759: primitive, secondary, tertiary-volcanic, and quaternary. They remain cautious, however, and explain that this is a hypothesis of the natural scientist.

They also collect recent world maps. On one of them, one can see the adjustments made by Captain Cook, who in 1769 established that New Holland and New Guinea are not connected. They also acquire maps with the consistent-angle conic projection and the consistent-azimuthal-area projection published by Johann Lambert in 1772. These complement the Mercator cylinder projections they

already had.

Both pairs want to stimulate the children's reasoning by pointing out how the desire to map the planet and increase knowledge about it simultaneously entails dangers. They develop two texts that warn of these dangers. The first concerns the exploration of the Bering Sea and the description of a large marine mammal by Georg Wilhelm Steller in 1741. The text explains that this description sparked an intensive hunt for the animal, for its meat, hide, and oil, for which the hunters were paid handsomely. From 1768 onward, the animal could no longer be hunted. The profit motive of adventurers and traders meant that the last specimen was discovered just thirty years after the first description is killed.

The second text is based on the ongoing conflict between American colonists and King George III following the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1763 and the Proclamation Act. Madeleine writes a story based on the adventures of woodsman Daniel Boone, who in 1767 developed rich hunting grounds in Kentucky. The local population contested this development. Madeleine offers a nuanced perspective, presenting the colonists' revolt not only as a rebellion against the tax burden imposed by the mother country and the monarchy. She also demonstrates how the colonists sought to disregard the treaties drawn up by the native population with representatives of the monarchy in order to satisfy their desire for property. When Jan and Madeleine discuss this with the rest of the family and other correspondents, it is brought to their attention that they are taking a position far removed from the prevailing narrative of a form of republican rebellion against the old nobility and the monarchy. Yet the four believe it's important to demonstrate how, beneath the legitimate desire for a more comfortable life, many colonists still maintain an attitude of completely ignoring all non-Europeans. Many continue to consider it self-evident to expel and possibly kill the local population, and that it's normal to import slaves to work the seized land.

Finally, the four also discuss the work of James Watt, who made significant improvements to the steam engine about ten years earlier. They also mention Saussure's solar furnace when discussing new forms of energy.

By the end of 1776, the first trading dock of the new port of Oostende was in use. The official opening of the sea lock took place on November 24th. Oostende's hinterland offers space for other activities. Johannes speaks with Jan about the growing demand for oysters. The De Loose brothers approached him about investing in the expansion of the oyster farm, which had begun on a two-hectare site in the Sint-Catharinapolder. Although the monopoly they obtained for all domestic sales expired in 1770, oyster farming and sales are flourishing. Jan agrees with Johannes to invest part of the family capital he managed for Dieudonné in oyster farming, thus strengthening the family's position in local fishing and related activities. When Tiene hears Jan is becoming a small shareholder in the local oyster farming business, she jokingly gives him a new recipe for oysters: *Potatoes in oyster shells*. It goes like this: '*potatoes, boiled with plenty of salt until done, are mashed, stir in butter and pepper and put this dough in the shells, which are placed in a copper kettle, with a lot of fire on the lid, to make brown crusts, putting no more fire at the bottom than is necessary to keep the dish warm*'.

The Kaastraat-friends are closely following the educational reforms sought by Empress Maria Theresa of Austria. These reforms began just over ten years ago, primarily in grammar schools. The central government wants to standardise schools and therefore issues a number of guidelines regarding *poësis* and *rethorica*. From then on, institutions must plan full school years and appoint teachers on an annual basis. Teaching dialectics is banned and punishable by a 1,000-guilder fine. The dissolution of the Jesuit Order resulted in the closure of 17 grammar schools. Today, there are approximately forty of these in the Southern Netherlands. The

Imperial government's reforms on grammar schools had no direct impact on the work in Kaaistraat. But the Lemaîtres and their friends are aware that their lessons and texts exceeded the government's expectations for the education of children between the ages of six and twelve. However, no one confronted them directly about this, and so they felt no pressure to simply continue working.

Everyone understands that the governor is not so much concerned with any particular local preceptor or private school, but with the church institutions themselves, which often surpass the wealth of the Lordships. The introduction of a more centralised school policy and greater control over grammar schools, incidentally, goes hand in hand with the ban on requiring novices to contribute a dowry. Furthermore, a stricter policy is being implemented for parishes. And tithe collectors will henceforth be responsible for the construction of parish churches themselves.

Throughout Oostende and the surrounding area, Jan Lemaître has been known since 1777 as an active denunciator of the slave trade in the overseas territories. He readily admits that the lives of the poor in the Flemish regions are miserable and deplorable. But he was petrified upon reading the accounts of John Stedman, and that is why he now publicly denounces the slave trade. Stedman himself left for Suriname as a soldier to participate in suppressing a slave revolt there. His life took a different turn when he fell in love with a slave woman whom he reportedly tried to free. A copy of his book *Five years Expedition against the revolted Negroes* occupies today a prominent place on the bookshelves of Kaaistraat. Jan never misses an opportunity to show visitors the dehumanising images it contains. He regularly writes to colleagues in the Southern and Northern Netherlands about everything he reads concerning slave trade and what he hears from sailors entering the country. As a result, Jan and Madeleine in the autumn host a couple of

schoolmasters from Sluis who also are friends of the first mate who sailed on *The Unity* commissioned by the Middelburg Commercial Company.

The guests of the Lemaître describe , as they were told the final days before crossing from Africa to Berbice, Essequibo, and Demerara. All told, it covers a period of three and a half months. Before the shared ordeal of the crossing, which applied to all the purchased captives, some had already spent five months in captivity on the ship. On that particular voyage, 329 enslaved people were purchased. The purchase often occurred without the ship having to dock on the African mainland. Typically, the captain would fire a cannon shot offshore to signal his interest in trading. Local traders could then offer their goods, including enslaved captives, by canoe. The ship slowly moves along the coast, firing a shot at regular intervals to invite trading. Immediately upon purchase, people are recorded as anonymous merchandise, without names or serial numbers. Therefore, it was impossible for the first mate to know whether the first purchased slaves survived the voyage or not. The logbook of that voyage only recorded that seven of the purchased slaves died before the crossing. The crossing therefore began with 322 slaves on board. The captain seemed primarily concerned about the high purchase price of the slaves and less so about the loss of some merchandise due to death. According to him, there were errors not only in recording the value of the trade goods but also in the selection of some of them. Cotton cloth is clearly a loss-making product on the Gold Coast. All in all, the merchandise cost approximately 60 guilders per “enslaved” on the upper coast, later almost 100 guilders in the Cape Lahoe region, and finally up to 170 guilders in the region between that cape and Elmina.

The seven deaths before the ship’s departure for the Caribbean were believed to have resulted from fights between prisoners. When the ship was nearly full, the hold became too narrow, and there was a shortage of proper food. Some of the prisoners contracted scurvy,

and the lime juice they had purchased didn't cure everything. Among the dead was at least one young girl. It was unknown whether three men actually died. They disappeared by jumping into the sea. It was thought they couldn't have reached shore due to the treacherous tides and sharks.

When Jan and Madeleine hear how the slaves were transported from Africa to Berbice, Essequibo, and Demerara, they are dismayed to discover that the story could just as easily have been about the transport of livestock. Their guests say they felt the same way. In his account of the voyage, the first mate, a friend of theirs, only expressed concern for *the load*. "Like any merchant who keeps his merchandise in good condition to receive a good premium on top of his wages," he explained. He explained that millet was taken on board to provide the prisoners with porridge. On slave ships, he claimed, considerable attention was paid to the prisoners' diet to keep them healthy. They made sure to have enough loin cloths on board to clothe the prisoners. A large quantity of water was also stocked for both the crew and the slaves. Drinking water was always boiled first even what was given to the prisoners. The barley porridge was diluted with salt water. Groats were alternated with horse beans, an excellent cattle feed.

The prisoners were provided with smoking materials during the day, and, as was often the case on long voyages, there was a large supply of lime juice, which served as a scent on the steerage where the prisoners slept and also combated scurvy. Lime juice and wine are good medicines in such situations.

So the tween deck was sprinkled with lime juice and scrubbed clean once a week. Juniper berries and incense were used to fumigate the stench. All this meant that, in the end, relatively few enslaved people died. All in all, 13 men, 4 women, and 3 children died during that crossing of the *Unity*. With the seven dead off the African coast and six others during the movement between *Berbice* and *Demerary* a total of 33 people died during this transport.

According to the first mate, it wasn't unusual for enslaved people to die simply because they refused to eat or sank into a deep melancholy. For the rest, diarrhoea was the main cause of death.

At the first two auctions in Berbice, sales averaged only 250 guilders per slave. That's three to three and a half times the annual wage of someone working in a workshop or *manufacture* and about a quarter of the annual salary of the mayor of Bruges. In total, the sale of the 296 surviving slaves brought in nearly 100,000 guilders, an average of almost 340 guilders per slave. As was customary, young children were sold along with their mothers.

According to the first mate, that voyage was of the *Unity* which took place about ten years ago, was a successful one for both the Company and its officers. The Middelburg Commercial Company made a profit of over 2,200 Flemish pounds, more than 13,300 guilders. The captain received almost 600 Flemish pounds for the entire voyage, and the first mate who told the story received approximately 220. Therefore they had been on the move for just over 600 days and away from home for 18 months. Converted to 20 months' work, the captain received almost 3,600 guilders in total, twice the annual income of the mayor of Bruges. The first mate's annual income was slightly lower than that of the mayor, but equal to that of a first alderman. The officers earned part of their income based on the slaves they sold. They received a bounty per slave sold, which amounted to a total of almost 200 Flemish pounds for the captain and almost 60 Flemish pounds for the first mate.

Jan notes that, now as then, the slave trade is very profitable. As usual, a third of the captain's wages comes from the bounty on the proceeds of the sold slaves. The chief mate's candour with his friends about his own income contrasts sharply with the vague claims Jan hears in the port of Oostende when he speaks to ship's officers who are, or have been, directly or indirectly involved in the slave trade.

The Zeeland-guests agree. Their friend's story also clearly showed

how just as on land there are also significant wage differences at sea. On the voyage in question, a sailor's total wage was just under 50 Flemish pounds for a year and a half away from home, an annual salary of about 200 guilders, or about 3,940 *stuivers*. The cabin boys received a wage of just over 102 guilders for that 18-month voyage. This is equivalent to the wage of a workshop worker. The ordinary sailors were allowed to engage in some trading on their own account to a limited extent, but Jan's guests cannot say what that actually yielded. They do know that the black slaves of the *Unity* were purchased by about forty buyers. One of the important buyers was a pastor. Jan notes that this pastor, like many others, may have assumed that God permitted him to trade people as goods as long as they were not Christians. Or he had read Voltaire and agreed with him that it concerned a different species. This species, then, might not have been created in God's image, so he should not consider his property as God's children.

Madeleine points out that the way European rulers treat their own people raises many questions. But using their power to exile their own subjugated populations and to induce them to regard inhabitants of other regions, including local rulers, as a different, inferior species, has something morbidly demonic for her. Christians and non-Christians alike, including many European humanist pioneers, offer rational explanations to justify the enslavement or extermination of the original inhabitants of the territories they occupy and the forced relocation of other peoples. It is about brutal and deadly domination and subjugation. God is misused, at every opportunity, as if He authorises the slaughter and abuse of people who, in certain human eyes, are not considered their own kind.

Karel notes that this pathological urge to abuse throughout history may be a characteristic of rulers today. And that European rulers who themselves act so audaciously set a terrible example for those who conquer land and wealth in their name, acting just as ferociously, if not more ferociously. Jan then points out that the

instruction to wield weapons and kill without being killed is a training with a long and successful tradition that dates back to long before the gladiators. Education solely for the multifaceted knowledge and science of nature apparently can't stand up to this. According to Tiene, this is because dogmas developed and imposed by rulers don't prohibit violence. Ironically, these same dogmas set limits on the dissemination of natural knowledge, sometimes under penalty of fine or death. Madeleine gravely notes that their schoolhouse is a small, anonymous exception to the general state of affairs. Are they making it harder, rather than easier, for the children to integrate into the surrounding community? All four are convinced that learning to reason and analyse is better than being unknowingly manipulated.

## Schools and taverns

Voltaire died on May 30, 1778. Jan and Madeleine learned of his death in a letter from Lille. Mathilde noted in the letter that Voltaire always ensured the publication of Émilie's work, but that he was at most a European humanist, and certainly not a universal one. To her knowledge, he never corrected his observations on different types of people. In doing so, he contributed to the *status quo* with regard to the enslavement of peoples outside Europe and the associated profitable slave trade.

A little over a month later, Jean-Jacques Rousseau also died. As he had promised before, he left all his possessions to Therese Levasseur. When they married, he made her his sole heiress. He left his rather controversial ideas regarding child rearing to many schoolmasters. He wrote down his proposals but never applied them to his own children. Moreover, according to what Madeleine and Jan learned, he never acknowledged them.

What they are not yet able to imagine is that Joseph Lancaster, born on November 25th of that same year, would have a much stronger influence on the future school system and its teachers. His will propose a school organisation, combined with the instruction for the poor as developed by Jean Baptiste La Salle, among others, and increasingly shift compulsory education away from universal enlightenment to science. The gigantic instructional model designed to push or keep children in a specific role from an early age is becoming increasingly clear.

In many places, small school teachers today earn between 350 and 500 guilders a year. Parents pay up to one-fifth of this amount directly in the form of tuition. A school teacher's annual salary is less than a quarter of what a slave ship captain earned fifteen years ago, and considerably less than half of a first mate's salary during

the same period.

The education and powers of the small school and of the colleges are in the *Austrian Netherlands* today are regulated by imperial decree. Currently, three of the fifteen planned Theresian Colleges are in actual use, in Brussels, Antwerp, and Ghent respectively. Each college is headed by a principal who belongs to the clergy. Science, mathematics, geography, and contemporary history fill a significant portion of the curriculum, but the emphasis remains on Catholic religion and Latin. Today, the Theresian Colleges accommodate approximately three out of ten of the total number of grammar school pupils. Most parents who wish or are able to enrol their boys in secondary school prefer the colleges of Augustinians, Dominicans, Franciscans, or Oratorians.

Even less evidence of the desired centralisation of schooling as in grammar schools or colleges is found in the little schools. Apparently, no one pays much attention to the education and fate of children in orphanages or poorhouses. Most urban little schools receive rather vague guidelines. This is also the case with the poorhouse in Oostende. The school receives little support, except from a few wealthier citizens who believe they are thus providing for their own salvation. The education there is lamentable. Over the past five years, the schoolmasters have succeeded one another in rapid succession, either because they did not properly fulfil their duties or because the magistrate thought so. More importance remains attached to a rudimentary education that ensures the employment of the young people with a master or in a workshop. The schoolmasters ensure that the children are not only fed and clothed, but that, for example, the girls learn housework in addition to lacemaking, knitting, and sewing, to properly prepare them for work as maids. If possible, boys are allowed to learn a craft of their choice free of charge. This allows them to work as assistants for a master and potentially acquire mastery in their chosen craft.

According to Jan and Madeleine's friends, the situation in Zeeland

isn't much different from that in the Austrian Netherlands. Until twenty years ago, young children's schools, where boys and girls learn their letters, required little more than central approval. It was assumed that anyone applying for such approval was competent to teach boys and girls to spell and read. Only since the mid-1750s specially appointed schoolmasters visit the little schools, often handing out small gifts to the best readers. This is now creating a greater demand for central regulations regarding the necessary basic knowledge of schoolteachers. Currently, in many places in Zeeland, permits are subject to this central regulation.

Personal news arrives from Leuven. Jean-Jacques and Elise Duchamp are madly in love. Jean-Jacques makes it clear in his letters to his parents. He also gets along exceptionally well with Elise's parents, which Jan and Madeleine had expected. The young couple live with Elise's parents and will continue to do so as long as Jean-Jacques studies at the university, but plans are being made. They want to open a school house in Bruges similar to the one Jean-Jacques' parents have in Oostende. They also want to continue working on an educational philosophy that focuses on learning, not teaching. They envision a mathetic rather than a didactic approach, in the words of Comenius. The dynastic tendency resurfaces, Jan believes, when the young couple expresses their desire to conduct joint research in a world where male arrogance still denies women the right to attend university. After all, Elise is forbidden from attending university classes.

Jan writes to his parents about these developments. Dieudonné replies that Mathilde and he are very pleased that one of the granddaughters of former *dinner*-fellows now connect with one of their own grandsons.

In the same letter, Dieudonné explains that Mathilde and he decided to publish several texts in which they openly endorse the proposition that it is impossible to scientifically prove the existence

of God. They thus resolutely adopt the skeptical stance of Hume and Kant. But they attempt to go a step further. This is the only way to substantiate their cosmopolitanism and to support their conviction that only one human species exists. They can thus also distinguish between the natural sciences and the science of humanity. Nature is as it is and does not need a human god to reveal itself. On the contrary, it is collective human ingenuity that gradually provides a better understanding of natural phenomena. These phenomena are processes in themselves and develop independently of human will, and according to Dieudonné and Mathilde, there is no Great Architect behind them. They distance themselves from any obscurantism or belief in transcendental intervention. For the same reason why they see no extra-human intelligence in the existence of *numeri primi* — first numbers —, they also fail to see this in the regularity of planetary orbits or the movement of stars relative to each other at certain times of the year. Just as eclipses are easily explained and predicted once Newtonian mechanics is understood and applied, so, according to them, will volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, the apparent affinity between certain animals or plants, and so many other aspects of nature not yet understood one day. Therefore, they want to encourage their grandchild, together with his partner, to always keep in mind the mathematical approach to the educational processes they are interested in. Gaining insight with the sole purpose of proposing new hypotheses to collectively deepen that insight seems to them to be the noble task of those engaged in research into the human mind, how it is formed and nurtured individually and collectively, and the importance of the interaction between human minds.

For Dieudonné and Mathilde, the experience of God is a strictly personal one. In many cultures and peoples, this experience serves a comforting function, such as during grieving processes, but also a reassuring function in the face of unexplained phenomena. They are convinced that the combination of these two functions contributes

to bringing people to equilibrium. This applies to everyone. Equally, anyone can establish a balanced framework of thought that doesn't involve God.

It is then only a small step to determine how those who seek power abuse the idea of God of others and how false the call for the destruction of dissenters is. After all, those who wield arrogant power abuse the faith of many and poison the faithful with personal interpretations of power and possessions. Dieudonné recounts how, in recent years, during the *dinner* meetings, he increasingly retells Bible stories, subtly emphasising how many members of the clergy manipulate Bible stories as free pacifiers or to justify their own power. Their attitude is causing some tension. A climate of unrest prevails in France, and some see Mathilde and Dieudonné's positions as a defense of all those who are critical of the King and the Church, while others see them as a warning against the intolerance of those who question everything, including the King and the Church.

Intolerance... On European roads, the growing number of travellers needing refreshments or overnight accommodations is creating a growing number of inns, even outside of cities. In the county of Flanders alone as part of the Austrian Netherlands there were around three thousand in 1778. These inns served thick beer and thin beer, or small beer. The latter had a very low alcohol content and, in many places, was an alternative to non-existent drinking water because waterways and ditches were polluted. Liqueurs and often brandy are also served. Wine, coffee, and tea remain expensive, and inns generally do not serve these beverages. The central government is trying to curb the proliferation of inns with the help of the Church. Since July 21, 1779, an edict has issued similar guidelines throughout the County of Flanders. But these guidelines are often futile or impractical. The Church and innkeepers are at odds. According to the clergy, inns are corrupting

places that encourage mixed encounters between unmarried people. This is the main reason why the Church supports the central government's efforts to curb alcohol consumption. But even the government ultimately realises the futility of banning bachelor parties and end-of-summer celebrations. Young people will always find opportunities to meet each other, in public or clandestinely, despite all excommunication or fines.

The edict with the new ordinances is therefore causing widespread protest. And since local authorities are responsible for implementing the measures, the whole issue is entirely unrealistic. Inns are part of the community. Curfews, mandatory closing times, and restrictions on shooting competitions and fairs are far from popular. Banning some of these could have the opposite effect and quickly lead to unrest. Therefore, local authorities consider it impossible to draw up a list of redundant inns to be closed.

In Leuven, there is some hope. The weakening of the pedagogical discipline due to more conservative sectors of the Church and the further development of experimental science mean that the teaching of new knowledge and research is now in a better state.

Jan Pieter Minckelers, a former student of Pedagogy De Valk, is studying a flammable gas that he discovered can be extracted from coal. He uses this odourless gas to light his auditorium.

But outside the university, the advancement of artificial lighting and the convenience it brings, portends new problems. In a report on a study of young spinners, Noël Retz demonstrates that their activity is the cause of their health problems. Many girls suffer from dry coughs and chest pains. There are legitimate fears that improved lighting during the cold winter months will lead to longer working hours, which will only exacerbate the spinners' difficulties.

In the European music world, music lovers are getting to hear new sounds. Jean-Jacques and Elise admire more than just Bach's work. Influenced by Elise's parents, the young people have attended

several chamber performances featuring works by Haydn and the 23-year-old Mozart, who has been given the title *the child prodigy* in more than one place. It is said that Johan van Beethoven also shared his paternal desire to produce a child prodigy. Wherever he went, he enthusiastically praised his son Ludwig. He is said to have already mastered Bach's well-tempered keyboard by heart at the age of nine.

Music-loving Elise believes that musical education is essential in the school she wants to establish with Jean-Jacques. Children should not only be able to listen to skilled musicians on stringed and plucked instruments, but they should also be able to experiment on them themselves. She's thinking of the guitar or the recently very popular mandolin in Mantua, Milan, and Venice, and also the harpsichord and pianoforte. Do such instruments belong in classrooms where young children are still learning to read, write, and count? Or are they only for so-called prodigies? And, Elise continues, what is the connection between upbringing, instruction, and prodigious achievements?

The port of Oostende has been experiencing a great deal of activity. Since the early 1780s, it has been common to see more than 50 ships departing with each tide. Most of these set course for America, but other commercial destinations are also being considered. The fishing industry is also experiencing a boom. The port's success coincides with the municipal authorities' plans for urban expansion. The Empress always welcomed them. When she died on November 17th, the people of Oostende were sad but not overly concerned. The son who succeeded her with his eagerness for reform is well known. She herself urged caution in the rather conservative Austrian Netherlands. However, it was learned from reliable sources that the new ruler, Joseph II, had already written to Prince Kaunitz, expressing his wish to make Oostende a free port to absorb the economic consequences of the peace treaties between

the surrounding powers. As long as the English, Dutch, and French royal families remained hostile to each other, this was beneficial for commercial connections via Oostende. And now Joseph II assumes that a free port on the coast of *Belgium Austriacum* will be considered a domestic matter and will not cause resentment among neighbouring countries. Preparations for his joyful entry into the city next spring are almost complete. The proclamation of a free port will likely be part of the festivities.

The Kaaistraat naturally follows the city's development. More commercial activity means more people and more financial opportunities, and the school benefits from that. There's a lot to do. Jan doesn't always have the time to continue his research on school and children's books, but still... His father told him that he should find a book from 1722 by Manoel de Figueiredo in grandfather John's library, in which the author also criticised spelling. When he reads through that criticism and finds copies of the hornbooks himself, the *Rooster-books* and the *Staircase of Youth*, he can only agree that these textbooks map out the same slow and mind-numbing path to learning reading as those books Figueiredo spoke about at the time.

He reflects on Bastiaan Cramer's introduction to the *Staircase of Youth* from 1772. In it, Cramer suggests that a new form of school fees with fixed monthly amounts per family based on family income would improve school attendance. A fixed monthly amount would also ensure children to attend school more often. Cramer says: '*It is only Lovelessness, if the children only learn to dig in the earth all day long like moles; going to school is of no importance, and one cannot do without them either.*' Those who have a higher income and are already in the habit of sending their children to school would pay a little more school fees and in this way also contribute to allowing the teachers to enjoy a better, fixed income.

Jan understands Cramer's reasoning when he says that parents who themselves never attended a school don't see the importance of

school. But does a mandatory school fee, even a low one, actually lead to school attendance? Cramer rather easily places the decision in the hands of the *Fathers of the Fatherland seeking salvation* and points out four advantages:

- Many children who now die in ignorance would learn much more and be susceptible to the essential things of which their elders know nothing;
- The masters would be able to live better and thus devote more time to their profession without having to provide additional remuneration elsewhere.
- It would be easier to attract more skilled people to work in the schools.
- The poorest parents could send many more children to school for the same amount of money they now pay for fewer children.

Of course the *Staircase of Youth* according to Bastiaan Cramer, is an excellent book for teaching children when compared with the poor ABC books. But not everyone agrees. In Veere, the *Staircase of Youth* is not allowed in schools since 1743. The government then considered that even this book contributes '*more to the fatigue than the benefit and advantage of youth*'. It is unclear whether the criticism is related to the still considerable influence of spelling, or to the content of the reading lessons. According to the friends from Sluis, that criticism was quite common in Zeeland. By 1780, in many places, only the ABC book and the schoolbooks of Bakker, Maes, and Heugelenberg were permitted. Furthermore, *Brief Summary of Dutch Grammar* and the *New Dutch Game Book* imported by Reinier Arrenberg. The Middelburg printing company A.L. Callenfels and Son, on the other hand, thought it would be more interesting to publish the ABC in a different form: the letters were glued onto 25 square pieces of cardboard in eight different shapes, *serving to teach children the entire A.B.C. easily by playing a game or through play*'.

All in all, Jan observes, almost everywhere people still cling to spelling. Although the method is questioned because it slows down

the reading process and causes many difficulties in connecting letters to sounds, few switch to phonics methods. John and Mariana's quip that, historically, writing comes before reading and that decoding can only come after coding is apparently too abstract for most teachers. Those who reason didactically operate from the teacher's perspective which obscures the mathematical perspective on coding.

Jan thinks about what Jean-Jacques wrote to him about so-called child prodigies in the music world. When these children compose at a young age, do they use existing coding techniques? Or do they use their own coding, which they later develop with their teachers into a more universal code? He doesn't know. Can you get someone who can't read to tell a story? Yes. History shows that. Can that story be written down? Yes. By whom? Scribes have existed for a long time. But that was with adults. Do children who aren't child prodigies have a chance to tell something?

When he talks about it with Madeleine, she replies, "And what do they tell the children? Stories for children, or stories by adults?"

Madeleine's question is a valid one. Tiene and she have gradually become aware that books for children don't really exist. There is, of course, the catechism with adapted, simpler Bible stories. Fortunately, it seems *The Mirror of Youth* is no longer popular. You could hardly call it a book for the youth, let alone a children's book. The book was more like bad, insult-mongering literature that stirred up hatred and fear.

There are, of course, the heroic and adventure stories for adults that are often told to children but have little meaning for young children. Madeleine and Tiene are thinking of the book *Robinson Crusoë* by Defoe from 1719. Recently they received a copy of a book by Campe: *Handleiding tot de natuurlyke opvoeding of Robinson Crusoë, geschikt te dienste der jeugd [Manual for natural education or Robinson Crusoe, suitable for the service of youth.]* It is a translation of *Robinson der Jüngere, zur angenehmen und nützlichen Unterhaltung für*

*Kinder*. Only the title makes it clear that this is not a children's book. It is a collection of moralistic stories in which Campe uses *Robinson Crusoe* by Defoe and Rousseau's *Emile* as inspiration. In this book, a father spends thirty evenings recounting episodes from the story of Robinson Crusoe, the antithesis of the Good Family, with a proper father and mother and well-behaved children. The children are encouraged to praise Robinson whenever he improves his life. They are also invited to recreate small inventions from Robinson, such as a sunshade. But you could also say that the book is actually intended more for educators as a kind of quirky practical guide for the *natural education* of Rousseau.

According to Tiene and Madeleine, the songbooks for children and their parents are sometimes dubious. Rhymes such as

'Lieve Telgen, waardste Schatten,  
Speelt vry om en op myn' schoot!  
Als myne armen u omvatten,  
Ben ik als een Vorst zoo groot.'

[Dearest offspring, most precious treasures,  
play freely around and on my lap!  
When my arms embrace you,  
I am as great as a prince.]

We can, of course, remind parents of their role as parents and convince children that their parents truly love them. But Tiene and Madeleine have their doubts when they see the living conditions of poor children who are employed far too early. The parents are trapped in an economic straitjacket, and the children are also victims.

As soon as Emperor Joseph II comes to power, he wants to quickly implement his administrative modernisation plans in the *Austrian Netherlands*. He envisions a strong central government of national unity. This entails secularised services overseen by appropriate officials. With this, he aims to reduce the influence of the Roman Church on internal state affairs. According to the

Emperor, a central government would benefit his desired reforms, which would facilitate public support.

In 1781, the reigning monarch personally oversaw the introduction of civil tolerance. This granted Protestants, and later Jews as well, full civil rights and — albeit still limited —religious freedom. It was enough to sow unrest in the Catholic Low Countries. During a secret visit to the *Austrian Netherlands* the Emperor stirs further unrest among the local Catholic authorities, who see their freedoms as rulers threatened. Cardinal Franckenberg presents his objections to the Emperor. This sees no reason why he should make exceptions for his Dutch subjects to measures that were successful elsewhere in his Empire. So Joseph II simply carries on. He abolishes serfdom by imperial decree. The lords lose their personal power over servants, maids, and farmers. From now on, everyone has the right to marry without having to ask the lord's permission. The marriage is valid once an official register it. On paper, everyone also gains the right to leave their master and seek work elsewhere or learn a trade of their choice. The compulsory *in natura*, that is unpaid chores, are abolished. In themselves, these are measures that benefit the common people. But a decree on paper doesn't prevent harassment and circumvention. Landlords of a particular region can, of course, conspire to ensure that someone seeking another master simply finds no one willing to hire them. The small landed gentry and the clergy also cleverly exploit the ignorance of the less educated common people to portray the Emperor's measures as dangerous and against the will of God.

Jan remembers his father and grandfather often remarking on how the expression '*God has willed the classes*' is used indiscriminately, even by many humanists. How easily could they, in church and in the country, pull the wool over the eyes of ignorant people and suggest that the Emperor's newfangled ideas only lead to eternal damnation for those "subjected" to them? Previous generations of the Magister-Lemaître dynasty had already witnessed how centrally

taken decisions, intrinsically beneficial to those with few rights and little education, are made unpopular in subtle and less subtle ways, even among those who primarily benefit from them. It seems that arrogant, petty rulers are more adept at exploiting the ignorant populace to their own advantage than the arrogant, enlightened despot, even when genuinely convinced that he is making decisions for the benefit of that same ignorant populace.

Maria has been visiting Jan and Madeleine quite often lately. She has been inconsolable since Begga de Bruges died almost a year ago. She needs to talk about the ongoing political changes now that she is missing the conversation partner of a lifetime. Begga was only six years older than Maria and had quickly developed the same affection for her as she had for her mother. Jan and Maria discuss the Emperor's tolerant measures. Maria has certainty the Beguine would find them insufficient.

After Begga's death, Maria also corresponds with Mathilde more frequently. As a result, the family is now better informed about developments in France than before. And there, the tensions are of a different nature than in the Austrian Netherlands. Mathilde Larouge cites her correspondence with several noblemen. Regarding Nicolas de Caritat, Marquis of Condorcet, she says that, in her view, he not only envisioned necessary and far-reaching changes in the state's financial policy, but also considered the secularisation of education. He was, in fact, aiming for a form of power grab, like many of his peers. These reforming aristocrats disapproved of the way schemers secure the support of the poor and illiterate population, including by spreading or endorsing seditious language. As Mathilde better understood the wide-ranging reasons for the discontent, she anticipated a scenario that would likely culminate in violence, fratricide, and murder, as was the case during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation.

She shares her concerns with Maria in two letters. In one, she

admits that Dieudonné and she are often viewed with suspicion. This is because they openly denounce abuses of power, both within the Church and in government. As had happened to them before, some regard them as conspirators against the de facto absolute power of the king, while others see them as loyal supporters of the absolute monarchy because of their critical stance on the interference of the Church and the Ultramontanes in secular affairs.

Oostende is celebrating. After sailing along the coast from Dunquerque for several days, Emperor Joseph II enters the city through the Westpoort. It is June 11th, and on this memorable day for Ostend residents, the port officially receives free port status for virtually all goods.

The free port immediately leads to a new urban expansion. The dismantling of old fortifications frees up new plots of land for new homes. The Lemaître family and their friends Karel and Tiene are closely following the planned expansion. They want to sell the house on Kaaistraat, which has become too small, and build a new schoolhouse with a library and residential house if their financial means allow. They anticipate that the free port will attract many new residents to the city and that their well-maintained houses will have a high market value. By the autumn, the urban plans are clear. At the end of July, work began on removing the ramparts and filling in the moats west of Kaaistraat. The Kaaipoort gate will be demolished, along with three ravelins, two west of the gate and one east of it. The city will take possession of the vacant land, and Jan and Karel know from Johannes that some of this land will be sold at public auction. Johannes also tells us that City Pensionary Knight Thomas de Grysp erre wants a unified style for the new quay overlooking the new docks and will certainly push through his ideas. Through Johannes' intervention the family succeeds in acquiring a building plot near the Waterhuis on what will be known as Keizerskaai. However, they must accept the building project from

the architect who will safeguard the unified style desired by de Grysperre. This is what Johannes tells Jan and Madeleine shortly after the visit of Archduchess Christina of Austria at the end of August.

To ensure the schoolhouse's operations will not be interrupted, Jan negotiates the sale of the building on Kaaistraat with the bank financing the new building. The new place is expected to be ready by the end of 1782 or the beginning of 1783. Upon its opening, it would have room for four to five classes, and the four schoolmasters agree to bring in a third couple. The condition is that the newcomers possess a solid foundation of knowledge and a desire to stay abreast of developments in science and technology. Like themselves they also have to dispose of some own capital. The Schoolhouse on Kaaistraat, and soon on the new quay is not a purely commercial initiative. It is a meeting and learning place for children and adults. The initiating couples want sufficient time to reflect on their work as teachers and therefore can't depend solely on the schoolhouse's tuition.

In Flandres reducing inn attendance is as difficult as encouraging school attendance. Almost everywhere, after five months, the ordinance closing down drinking houses that received a negative recommendation remains a dead letter. Karel recalls that the officials of the Brugse Vrije recently even informed the Fiscal Council of Ghent that it is simply not possible to reduce the number of drinking houses.

To better monitor drunken brawls after sunset and to increase street safety, Oostende city officials are developing new regulations for the city's lighting. Streetlights with light barriers will be installed at all intersections in the city, fifty-six in total. New regulations are also needed to address garbage, disease, and flooding. As the importance of washing and bathing in the sea gained traction, this became clear to central and local officials. Hygiene gradually ceased

to be a personal matter and became a collective responsibility. In December 1781 an announcement was made that water pollution and air pollution caused by burning substances or emitting unpleasant odours would be dealt with more strictly. Jan and Madeleine proposed a new text to be included in the textbook for the children learning to read in their classes.

During this time, Karel suggests meeting former alderman and postmaster Jacobus Bowens. Karel knows that Sir Bowens is compiling a chronicle about the city of Oostende. Perhaps this chronicle will provide material for stories to give the children a sense of the city's development. The conversation does indeed take place, and the immediate result is that Tiene and Madeleine compile three texts based on the information Jacobus Bowens provides. The texts are, in practice, short stories told in the first person. Each story takes place within a specific, short time period. The final story deals with the current urban expansion.

Jan and Madeleine's friends in Zeeland are surprised by the relatively large number of children in the school on Kaaistraat. Currently, 45 children are learning to read, write, and do arithmetic at the Sluis city school, 28 of whom are boys. The orphan school has 13 children, 7 of whom are girls. Both schools are mixed, with both boys and girls. In this respect, there is a similarity with the school for the poor in Oostende, which has slightly more students, and with the school house of Jan, Madeleine, Karel, and Tiene.

The friends confirm that in the Northern Netherlands too, there are no other books for children than schoolbooks. In this context the illustrated *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* by Comenius can be seen as a kind of children's encyclopedia. Van Alphen's books also sell quite well. Not long ago, a special edition of the ABC-book was published to satirise the Prince of Orange. Although a textbook serves as a basis, one might seriously question whether this book is intended for children.

There's also Swildens' ABC book, which contains what could be described as moral texts. It contains dialogues such as: '*A person who is very rich, lives in a large and magnificent house, keeps a carriage and horses, and can command the service of many people, would such a person actually be better than other people?*

*Answer. No, certainly not. And if such a person is not sensible and virtuous, then he can be a very bad and dangerous person, indeed much worse and more dangerous than a common scoundrel walking down the street: for then he can do much more and much greater harm.*

## Small and large schools

The war in America between colonists and British troops continues to positively influence port activities in Oostende. Unfortunately, Jan believes, this is a recurring phenomenon. Whenever armed conflict erupts somewhere, traders profit handsomely, and economic activity increases.

But the free port has also attracted other investors. Scottish wholesaler Herries was granted permission to set up a bank and currency exchange on Brabantstraat.

The old city is in need of a thorough renovation, and trading houses and warehouses are springing up like mushrooms on the new plots. These days, it's not uncommon to find up to twenty clerks in some offices, and even more packers in the warehouses.

During their Sunday walks, Jan and Madeleine and their friends often walk along the dismantled city walls and observe the progress of the new construction in various places around the city. From mid-August 1782 onward, they regularly visit the progress of what would become their new schoolhouse and residence, on the quay north of the new docks, now officially known as Keizerskaai.

Tiene and Madeleine have been diligently searching for candidates to work in the new schoolhouse. Tiene discusses it with Louise, granddaughter of Pieter van Heurck. Louise's son, Boudewijn, recently married one of the Hoyt children. The young people are clearly more interested in head work than in the fishmonger's business. One evening, they visit Jan and Madeleine, accompanied by Tiene and Karel. Boudewijn introduces his wife, Gertrude. Jan asks them why they would be interested in working with four old dreamers.

Gertrude immediately begins: "You surely know that Boudewijn and I are friends of Jean-Jacques and that we often visited each other before he left for Leuven. When Jean-Jacques visited Oostende last

year, we often talked together. He told us about his plans to start a kind of school in Bruges with Elise, like you had here in the Kaaistraat when we were still children. I talked about it with Boudewijn. He read all the works of Rousseau. Because he is very interested in natural education, he tracked down a pedagogue in the Confederation of XIII Cantons. You may have heard of him already. His name is Pestalozzi. When we read his book *Lienhard and Gertrud* at the end of last year, I thought about the conversations with Jean-Jacques. I was thrilled to hear that Tiene and Boudewijn's mother know each other, and Tiene said you were considering expanding the school building.

Madeleine, who looked up in surprise when she heard the name Pestalozzi, now says: "So you keep track of what's being written about natural education and working with children? Yes, we've already read some of Pestalozzi's writings. We'd also like to better understand how he intends to tackle poverty. He supposedly once said that the poor must be lifted out of poverty. We fully endorse his assertion that inequality isn't addressed through charity, but through the acquisition of knowledge. It's still unclear to us whether he follows most contemporary philosophers and advocates for a specific education for the poor. In my opinion, this perpetuates the gap between rich and poor, even if the poor have more autonomy to manage their own lives, as the Emperor apparently administratively arranges by abolishing serfdom."

Boudewijn looks up and asks: "But do you think Pestalozzi will go down that path?"

Karel replies: "We don't have a clear picture. What we do know is that, until now, we haven't found an equivalent to our project, which deliberately involves children from different backgrounds working together. Of course, we know that some schools set tuition based on the parents' wealth, but that's the exception rather than the rule. Moreover, the differences are often not very significant. In Oostende, we don't count children of the aristocracy among our

students, except for a few sons and daughters of high-ranking officers stationed here. What we propose isn't limited to specific training for the poor but encompasses specific training for all children. Vocational training shouldn't start too early."

Gertrude asks: "But isn't early vocational training precisely the prerequisite for the poor to escape their poverty? Isn't vocational knowledge the key to independence?"

"Of course, vocational knowledge is the key to independence," Tiene notes. "But that's true for everyone, not just the poor. However, we find that inequality persists as long as children of the wealthy have more time to acquire basic knowledge than children of the poor before starting specific vocational training. We are trying to demonstrate that. To approach the Comenius' *Omnes Omnia Omnino* principle, we believe we must also adopt his systemic proposal. It consists of six years of elementary school and six years of grammar school for everyone before anyone begins vocational training. Perhaps that's not feasible. Perhaps no one with a high level of basic knowledge wants to be someone else's servant or labourer. Owners cannot, or do not want to do without subordinates if they want to secure their property. And can everyone in a community work independently even with a limited level of basic knowledge? Haven't we seen the opposite trend over the past fifty years? How small independent workers had to sell their production to owning middlemen who concentrated production in workshops, thereby turning small, poor independent workers into small, poor dependents? Perhaps both we and Pestalozzi are mistaken, and the rich owners are laughing at our naiveté.

"Which doesn't change the fact," Jan begins, "that we do indeed want to expand our group with another couple. Thinking about learning and the learning process is very important, whether we're criticised for being naive or not. Personally, I'm very pleased to know that you're quite well-informed about what some people are

writing today about the art of learning and the art of teaching. Moreover,” Jan looks at the others, “I think it would be a good thing for the school to attract younger people to work with us. What do you think?”

Two days later, Boudewijn and Gertrude receive a message from Tiene confirming their agreement to expand their partnership. In September, they will begin working as additional adults in the existing groups. Immediately after the move, they will share responsibility for a new group. However, the principle remains that any adult in any group can be available for one or more children in specific circumstances.

That same month in September, newlyweds Jean-Jacques Lemaître and Elise Duchamp settle in Bruges, just a few hours from Kaaistraat. They begin their school adventure there with a small group of children, the youngest almost five years old and the oldest just over nine. The three youngest children participate in meaningful activities, including playing with straw figures, listening to stories based on wall charts, and illustrated books. There is a piano forte and two mandolins. Elise is quite adept at playing the instruments and had the children listen to music. Everyone is welcome to try out the piano forte.

While the young couple tries to think of more for the small schoolhouse in Bruges in 1782, baby Friedrich Fröbel sleeps in Oberweißbach/Thür Wald. For almost everyone, it’s still fifty years too early to think about paper folding and building blocks. And it’s also too early to even suspect that a member of the dynasty will cross paths with Friedrich.

In France, friends of Mathilde and Dieudonné are once again urging them to remain calm. Just as in the 1730s, when they were forced to flee Paris due to pamphlets found in their home and their stances on the church and the education of the poor, suspicion of them is growing.

Dieudonné finds himself in trouble with the clergy because of his original way of presenting Bible stories. In one of his texts on the privileges of knowledge, he argues that those who are scientifically educated easily learn to distinguish between a message of faith and the misuse of dogma to manipulate ignorant individuals and impose their own viewpoints. Those who wield power and effectively impose their own moral and religious views will not appreciate this text.

Dieudonné also examines the Moorish influence on science. He hypothesises that some flourishing universities in the caliphates from 200 to 700 years ago were partly due to a lower level of knowledge of Aristotelian science, but primarily to a less dogmatic approach to it. According to him, a secondary consequence of this was that less importance was attached to the outdated numerology of the Greeks. Moreover, there was a good understanding of Eastern astronomy and astrology. All of this meant that in the universities where Muslim philosophers worked and studied, knowledge remained available that was dismissed as false by the all-controlling Christian Church as soon as it did not align with Aristotle's propositions. However, he adds, this does not mean that the Muslim world rid itself of arrogant male leaders who control how ordinary people, and especially women, gain access to the natural sciences, just as is the case in the Christian world. Here, as in the Christian world, says Dieudonné, property owners, worldly and religious leaders impose their will, if necessary by force.

Dieudonné is a storyteller. He draws his own epic stories from the Bible. From ancient texts from Granada, he compiles his own tales of the Alhambra. From these tales, he adopts elements that Christians don't always present in their best light. This makes him even more suspect in Catholic Lille.

Mathilde and Dieudonné continue to follow the career of Nicolas de Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet. He has recently been admitted to the Académie Française. With the same enthusiasm with which they

introduced John and Mariana in Paris when they raised the dangers of arrogance and ignorance, they now spread the Marquis de Condorcet's ideas regarding human rights. They place particular emphasis on women and people of color other than white. They continue to do so despite knowing that the Marquis de Condorcet himself is increasingly showing sympathy for the colonists in America. With their revolt against the British crown, they are increasingly shaping a federation of states not governed by a monarch, but are making little or no progress toward the abolition of slavery. He clearly models his proposals for economic and administrative reform in France on what is happening in America. This increases both his supporters and his opponents. And again, in the royalist circles of Lille, anyone who shows sympathy for any of Nicolas de Caritat's ideas is automatically a suspect. Mathilde writes to Jan that the number of guests who accepted the invitations to the *dinner*-meetings are significantly smaller than ten years ago. Some of them are, of course, getting older, but she recognises the intolerance towards those driven by Knowledge and Science. This has become significantly stronger again. It's simply a fact, she says in another long letter to Maria, that those with more Knowledge and Science see more quickly and clearly when and how someone is simply using power arguments and fallacies to impose their own ideas. It's remarkable how many can be led to dedicate energy to combating Knowledge and Science instead of acquiring it. Perhaps the way that Science is taught in schools, both large and small, is not unrelated to this, Mathilde concludes.

These days, it's not as easy to stay abreast of what's happening in the world as it was in Wolfgang's time. This seems paradoxical now that more and more newspapers and magazines are being published. Much of what used to be barely relevant is now newsworthy.

Inventors also seem to be heralding a kind of acceleration in the

flow of news. And not just in the scientific realm. After the groundbreaking works of Bach and Mozart, music lovers talk about the 12-year-old Beethoven who had just published his Dressler Variations.

Furthermore, those with the money and time to buy instruments and make meteorological observations have made weather observations a hobbyhorse. In Mannheim, Karl Theodor, Elector Palatine raised the *Palatine Meteorological Society*. This should make it possible to carry out meteorological observations every day at exactly the same time anywhere in the world using similar instruments used by the Society and thus gain a world view of weather phenomena. Johan Jacob Hemmer took charge of the project and planned the first issue of *Journals of the Palatine Meteorological Society of Mannheim*. At this moment, people are busy distributing and setting up the instruments. On February 19, 1781, the *Palatine Meteorological Society* starts interacting with the Brussels Academy. However, the instruments didn't arrive in Brussels for over a year, and it took another year before publication could take place. What no one could have imagined was that this research, like many others, would be halted ten years later by devastating French troops who besieged Mannheim and destroyed the Elector's castle.

At the end of 1782, the Ostend teacher couples got information about the Irishman David Manson and his school. One of the captains working for Jan Ingelet was forced to interrupt his voyage on the return from America. The first autumn storms damaged the ship so badly that it had to be refurbished in Belfast before continuing on to Ostend. The captain spent the waiting time with a prominent family that had trading relations with the Ingelet family and with American importers. Several members of the family attended school with Manson himself.

The captain is a childhood friend of Boudeijn. On a December afternoon, he visits Kaaistraat. He tells: "What I found out is that

David Manson started originally a small brewery with his wife in the 50s. One of the regulars was Henry Joy, owner of *The News Letter*. He and David enjoyed discussing all sorts of things, including education. David often remarked that it should be possible to create a kind of playful school where teaching would feel like entertainment.

“Hmm,” says Karel, “does this idea of playing have anything to do with natural learning, or is it just a kind of desire to turn learning into entertainment?”

“I can’t judge that,” Boudewijn’s friend continues, “but listen further. Perhaps you can draw your own conclusions. I’m told that Manson started his own school in 1755 at Clugston’s Entry. He announced that, for a reasonable price, he could teach children to read and understand English without using a rod. He preferred to approach the instruction with enjoyable exercises to keep the children engaged. Like you, he opted for a mixed school of boys and girls. Henry Joy’s eldest child became one of Manson’s first students. Children from prominent families, such as McCracken, the naturalist John Templeton, and Dr. MacDonnell, also immediately joined.

David Manson assumes that children can guide their own learning and see themselves as assistants to their teacher. Manson mimics the adult world in the classroom. The best students of the day are assigned the roles of king and queen. Others are given titles in this “royal community” based on the grammatical knowledge they have acquired. Next in line are those who can remember less: tenants and subtenants. The rent owed entails attending part of a reading or grammar lesson. Those higher in the ranking are thus encouraged to help others. Once a week, the king convenes parliament in session to review the general state of affairs. The major difference from the adult world is that the hierarchy is not fixed, and anyone can change rank, as everyone is free to take as many lessons as they like.

After the initial phase of building a sufficiently confident group of students, Manson was able to accept children who had developed an aversion to reading due to persistent, harsh punishment. They weren't forced to do anything here, but could observe for themselves how the game developed. Anyone who paid attention to reading could join in, and so the newcomers gradually began to ask for it themselves.

Manson remains convinced that we must eliminate listlessness and fear from the little school system. He emphasises choice over coercion. "Having knowledge, diligence, and common sense isn't enough for a teacher. He must also have patience and be willing to make instruction and upbringing a game for both the children and themselves. That's roughly what I understand of David Manson's ideas and practice today," concludes Boudewijn's friend.

The teaching couples look at each other.

"It is clearly a rewarding system and not a punishing system," says Jan.

"I see influences from Rousseau here," Tiene notes. "Without leaving everything to nature, Manson assumes that children want to learn, and that strict and punitive teachers take away that desire to learn."

"What I find a little funny," Madeleine begins cautiously, "is that Manson also takes up Locke's idea that children are thinking beings who therefore deserve the respect and the right to be heard."

"And what's funny about that?" asks Karel.

"That in itself isn't funny," says Madeleine. "What is funny is that I can infer from our friend's words that Manson does not follows Locke, neither by making a distinction between boys and girls, nor between more affluent and poor children. In practice, Manson may even go further than Locke and have children work together in a shifting hierarchy regardless of their background."

"I understand, of course, why Jan says it's a rewarding system," Karel continues. "And what I'm saying now is perhaps just...

wishful thinking. It seems like a reward intended to promote cooperation. Can we really call this a cooperative system?"

Boudewijn notes: "As far as we know, David Manson has since started an evening school to train teachers. We could try to find out more about the content of that course. Perhaps he's simply pragmatic, or perhaps he's more knowledgeable about how children drop out and how to get them interested in learning again."

"That's a good idea," Jan agrees. "Boudewijn and Gertrude could even visit Manson's teaching school in Belfast."

"They'll have to visit the North Sea waves first then," Boudewijn's friend jokes. And as he looks at them, he adds: "But I'm convinced Ingelet will accept you as passengers if you're willing to embark on such a journey."

The first days of the new year are cold and windy. The children at the school house don't get to go outside much. They study, read, and draw indoors. Tiene and Madeleine gratefully make use of Gertrude's talent to finish some models with the older children. Some help pack books and cupboard contents for the impending move to Keizerskaai. On one of the many short walks from Kaaistraat to Keizerskaai during the last week of January, Boudewijn and Gertrude run into Boudewijn's mother. She tells them that at the Liebaerts' a boy was born the 19th. At Boudewijn's questioning look, his mother clarifies: "You know, we meet the Liebaerts occasionally at the activities of the Chamber of Rhetoric. *Wat ryp wat groen, komt wysheyd voën.* [What ripe what green is, wisdom nourishes]."

Karel and Jan tease Boudewijn about it for a few days when they learn he sometimes visits the Chambers of Rhetoric. Both have often criticised the high-flown language. Furthermore, the Chamber of Rhetoric generally maintains a distant attitude toward ordinary people. Not long ago, they had a rather heated discussion with two members of that Chamber regarding the organisation of their

school. It's clear that not all well-to-do citizens among the richest of Oostende agree to allowing children from different backgrounds to work and play together.

The entire move to Keizerskaai is almost complete when, in April, new reports arrived at the port about the tensions between the American colonists and the British Royal Family. Gradually, one could even speak of a full-blown war. This war is a good thing for neutral Hamburg. Shipping between that port city and the Netherlands increases. It isn't just about transporting goods to their final destination. Many goods first go to warehouses in intermediate ports before larger ships bring them either to Great Britain or to the liberating American colonists.

The free port of Oostende in the Southern Netherlands is also taking its share. The city's expansion and modernisation, which began about ten years ago, resulted in three new commercial docks south of the old city. The new Keizerskaai forms the northern boundary of that expansion. One of the city aldermen tells Jan and Madeleine how City Pensionary Knight Thomas de Grysperre reported to Brussels that there are already 30 new buildings north of the commercial docks. They are rather proud to be part of the group of owners and residents of such a new building, where their schoolhouse continues to grow. From Keizerskaai, they observe the increasingly bustling port activity. Residential areas are also emerging south of the docks. The Hazegras is developing there, taking over the northeastern part of the Sint Catharinapolder with homes and commercial spaces.

In mid-June, a persistent "dry fog" spread across the usually humid north. Not long before, a report arrived from France that the Montgolfier brothers had launched an unmanned hot air balloon. Immediately, some started claiming that the hot air balloon was a blasphemous project, that the balloon might have drifted northward, with the "dry fog" as a result.

From July onwards, more scientific explanations emerge.

The teacher pairs have access to several newspapers and learn how both meteorologist Baron Eugène de Poederlé d'Olmen and Abbot Chevalier have linked this natural phenomenon to earthquakes in southern Europe. Jan and Madeleine hear from their parents that De la Lande's theory is gaining traction in France. According to him, the fog is due to soil evaporation. But others disagree. Observations of this fog clearly indicate that it is a dry, sulfur smelling mist that gives the sun an unhealthy yellow color. Some say a punishment of God, the sun is suffering from jaundice! In both the Austrian Netherlands and France, people are particularly concerned because the fog also brings epidemics, particularly of rod or typhoid fever, but also of measles and lung diseases. For now, no one knows whether there is a direct link between the two phenomena. It is, of course, grist to the mill of the doomsayers, who see this as yet another announcement that the Last Judgment is near.

The mist doesn't make summer any less hot; quite the opposite. Despite the sun's veil, it's consistently warm. In Oostende, bathing carts based on the model devised by William Hasketh appear on the beach. This allows bathers to experience the supposedly positive influence of the sea without offending moralists. With bathing carts, sea bathing is more moral than any popular ball.

The entire month of July is warm, but not always dry. Both inland and on the coast, violent thunderstorms occasionally break out, and the flooding followed by renewed heat makes for a less healthy summer.

The continued good weather means that the last of the three new docks can be completed rapidly. It is scheduled to open to ships by August 15th at the latest. Governors Albert Casimir, Duke of Saxony-Teschen, and Maria Christina, sister of Emperor Joseph II, will grace the dock's opening ceremony.

On August 13th, His Highnesses, accompanied by their guests, including Count de Belgiojoso and Prince de Ligne, arrive by barge

at the Slijkens locks at high tide. Councillor De Grysperre greets them. He sails out to meet them with a fleet of decorated rowboats crewed by young people from the Guild of Bargemen of Oostende. The governors and their entourage take their places in one of the decorated boats. The procession enters Ostend harbour, preceded by the *Turkish Music*. The new middle trading dock is entered, followed by the keel-bank dock intended for the shipyards. The governors and the minister are pleased with the work on display. Back at the first dock, everyone can observe how easily the double bridges over the channels between the docks can swing. Then, the invited guests and city representatives to watch the entry of various ships.

The already existing obelisk commemorating the emperor now bears the following inscription: *'To Joseph II, illustrious monarch and greatest benefactor, father of the nation, who came to Oostende on 11 June 1781, and the same day abolished the duties by establishing freedom of trade. By order of the Emperor, the city was soon expanded, the shelter for ships was widened, and a safer entrance to the harbour was created; the grateful people of Oostende erected this memorial to him in memory of this great event.'*

The rest of the day the festival spreads across Ostend and in the evening the city is illuminated.

Autumn is approaching, and the warm summer months seem to be slowly giving way to colder days. However, there have been some violent late-summer thunderstorms with strong lightning and heavy thunder. Agricultural meteorologist Baron Eugène de Poederlé d'Olmen now offers a new explanation for the sulphurous haze of recent months, the persistent heat alternating with showers, the contradictory signs of the plant world that point to poisoning in some places, while certain harvests exceeding all expectations. Indeed, it is now known throughout northwestern Europe that a large volcano erupted in Iceland on June 8th and that the lava flow has not stopped to this day. The dust and smoke production and the

persistent winds from the northeast and north provide a much better explanation for the dry fog or yellow mist than the initial hypotheses. The volcano *Lakagígar* was apparently responsible for the persistent fog.

Meanwhile, the Montgolfier brothers are continuing to experiment with their hot air balloons. On September 19th, they let a sheep, a rooster, and a duck fly in one over Versailles. The animals reportedly survived the experience. It's only a matter of time before these kinds of balloons also carry people into the air. In December of this year, people in Oostende learned with some disbelief that such a flight had already taken place on November 21st. Naturalist Jean-Francois Pilâtre de Rozier and Marquis François-Laurent d'Arlandes made a real journey in a balloon. Unlike previous experiments, the basket was no longer attached to the ground with ropes. So, it can truly be said that people are now learning to travel by air, making use of the scientific knowledge they've acquired. Karel and Jan are delighted, and Boudewijn even more so. Gertrude and he wonder if it will ever be possible to travel to Belfast—or elsewhere—by air instead of by boat.

A further political message arrives from France. According to Mathilde's Parisian friends, Great Britain recognised America's independence in November with the Peace of Paris. With this, the British monarch explicitly accepted the Declaration of Independence of 1776. Tiene notes somewhat cynically that the arms dealers will have to devise a new war to maintain their lucrative trade. In a similarly sarcastic tone, Madeleine suggests that the plunder and subsequent oppression of Black Africans also benefits that trade. Moreover, in Rome, there are pious people, some of whom are always willing to encourage a new war against other pious people from other regions.

It's not entirely without reason that the friends talk about the pious people. The animosity works both ways. From Sluis, they learn that

the established authorities in Middelburg are still taking measures to target Roman Catholics. Roman Catholic women are banned when running a toddler school. Anyone attempting to disguise such a school as a “haberdashery” is in trouble. Corporatism lends a hand: protesting, non-Roman Catholic schoolmistresses refuse to pay their annual dues to the schoolmasters’ guild as long as there is competition from their Catholic colleagues. A complete ban on Roman Catholic education is soon implemented. The Church Council’s interference in the appointment of teachers by municipal colleges in schools run by public institutions is obvious to everyone. Little concern there is about the religious background of poor children in vocational education. The sewing school accommodates both Lutheran and Roman Catholic children. Jan and Madeleine’s friends from Sluis, by the way, think the whole religious frenzy is changing the educational system. The new schools in the Vrije van Sluis region, such as Cadzand, Retranchement, Schoondijke, Waterlandkerkje, and Zuidzande, are funded by clergy funds.

There’s also a new religious initiative in Oostende. On December 18th, 80 Anglicans will gather at the Engels Hotel on the Groentemarkt with the aim of establishing a Church of England community.

Christmas Day is quite cold, with snow everywhere. Throughout Western Europe, rivers and canals freeze over, hampering shipping traffic until February. On the last day of 1783, various measuring stations in the Austrian Netherlands recorded temperatures ranging from 13 negative degrees Réaumur to 24.4 negative degrees Réaumur.

The daily 15 *stuivers* barges from Ghent to Bruges and 10 *stuivers* barges from Bruges to Oostende are experiencing problems due to the freezing cold. The coach from Bruges to Oostende, which connects to the arrival of the barge from Ghent, remains in service for the price of six *stuivers* per person. As is the case in normal

winters, the stagecoach from Ghent to Lille does not operate between November and February. Under normal circumstances, the journey takes at least 12 hours, from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. With the freezing cold, the dark hours could prove fatal for many travellers. Early January, the Church of England community of Oostende will celebrate its first service in a warehouse on Sint Franciscusstraat. The schoolhouse on Keizerskaai will host some of the community's children. Jan and Madeleine are delighted with the growing diversity of the group.

Jean-Jacques and Elise are coming to Oostende for a short visit. They want to discuss their Bruges project with Jean-Jacques' parents' teaching staff. Jean-Jacques brings two copies of the *Almanac useful for the dioceses of Ghent, Bruges, Ypres and Doornik*. Now the Icelandic volcanic eruption is well known in these parts, the almanac also devotes attention to the event. Furthermore, it reveals a '*terrible story about the earthquake in Messina*' and '*the sad accident that happened on the island of Formosa in December 1782*'. The fire-breathing mountains, as the Almanac calls them, are clearly on top.

Jean-Jacques also brings a copy of the '*Den Katholyken Pedagoge ofte christelijken onderwyzer in den catechismus [The Catholic Pedagogue or Christian teacher in the catechism]*', published by the same printer which he bought for 35 stuivers.

A few days later, after their evening meal, the group discusses the Almanac and the lessons for the Christian teacher.

"If we compare the predictions of the Almanac today with those from the time of Grandfather Pieter," Jan begins, "then we can perhaps say that astronomy won over astrology."

"You mean there are no more vague predictions like '*Some of your friends will die*', or '*it will rain during this month*', but we can find a table with lunar and solar eclipses as well as one with the moon phases?" asks Madeleine.

"Yes, those moon phases are still important for determining the

dates for religious festivals that depend on the lunar calendar and therefore need to be converted to the annual calendar,” Karel explains. “Calculations of the future positions of celestial bodies are also still useful. But superstition is difficult to eradicate, and horoscopes are still popular, as far as I know.”

“Something else. Did you have time to browse through the ‘*Catholic Pedagogue*’,” asks Jean-Jacques.

Boudewijn laughs. “I found the opening sentence interesting, as an answer to the question about the benefit of the Catechism. There's little you can do about the argument compiled by Father Petrus Van den Bossche: *The Catechism is a good guide to the Catholic faith*. It's almost a Lapalissade.”

“Yes, listen,” Tiene reads, “he writes ‘Q. *How can one show the benefit of the Catechism?* A. *Because in the Catechism one acts of the highest Mysteries and Truths of the Christian Religion*’.”

“There's little to say about certain parts of the book. It's coherent with the entire way of thinking of those who lead Roman Catholics,” Madeleine begins. “What Begga de Bruges, despite her profound Christian faith, would have trouble with is the way the body is described here, too. Perhaps humanity, created in God's image, is bodiless; why else would it be spoken of so negatively?” She quotes: ““Q. *What can we observe in the human body?* A. *Three things. First, his vileness and wickedness, namely, that it is made of mud and earth and will soon turn into dust and stinking worms, yes, it is full of filth and subject to unnatural miseries. Secondly, its harmfulness, namely, that the body is an enemy of divine grace and our salvation, full of evil desires.*’”

Karel smiles. “You're not being entirely honest, dear friend,” he says. “There's a third observation, and it's a little less negative: ‘*Thirdly, its strangeness, namely, that the body is the dwelling-place of such a strange soul, and an instrument of divine grace and the holy Sacraments, and fit to rise gloriously with the soul.*’ That's quite a promise, isn't it? It will even rise spotless, despite initially being

made of filth.”

Jan looks at him: “Here I see the need for the separation between science and dogma. Of course, any faith can serve to comfort those struggling to face mortality, and if that helps, then one can only be grateful. But at the same time, science clearly shows that a dead physical body only decays further. In my opinion, this resurrection can only be understood symbolically, not literally.”

“The content is, I would say, a bit more angry when it comes to the enemies of Christ,” Elise notes.

“Yes,” Gertrude agrees, “how does it look? I have it: ‘*Q. Who do you call enemies of Jesus Christ and his Cross? A. Idolaters, Heathens, Turks, Jews, and Heretics are enemies of CHRIST and his Cross. Philip. 3, v. 18.*’ I think this is sowing hatred. I can’t understand how someone who speaks of enemies can be a follower of a loving figure, a figure who, according to the narrators of the same story, carries all the world’s burdens on his shoulders.”

“To such remarks, those followers will say that God gives us sufficient signals that He does not like His enemies,” Karel replies. “In the Christian faith, there’s a constant dilemma between an angry, punishing, and destructive god and a kind, understanding, and forgiving god. This confirms my view that the whole story is human and not transcendental. Those emotional outbursts seem to me to be projections of one kind of self onto another kind of self. Or else we have to accept that we are effectively created in the image of a capricious transcendental figure, a kind of Zeus who wants to do his best but can never control himself.”

“It’s interesting that you brought up Zeus,” says Jan. “I found one of the examples showing the power of the cross interesting. Listen: ‘*A Catholic and a heretic were traveling together to Geneva (Flo. 1.8. C. 4.S.1), when suddenly a great storm of thunder and lightning arose. The Catholic, according to his custom, made the sign of the Cross; but the heretic, seeing this, began to mock and scorn it, and asked if he could drive the flies away from his sight with it. But God Almighty, who is not*

*laughed at, immediately struck this slanderer dead with a bolt from heaven; and the Catholic, who stood by his side, remained unhindered and unharmed.*' It's interesting for several reasons. First and foremost, there's the Zeus humor: you're laughing at me, ha, take that. And then there's the Zeus lightning bolt. There you have it. The rebellious giant has become a sinful heretic.

But at the same time we can raise some concerns about the debate between faith and superstition. Does a sign of the cross really protect against lightning? Wouldn't it be better to use Benjamin Franklin's invention? I heard not long ago that, on the advice of the physicist Krayenhoff, a lightning rod was installed on the tower of the Reformed Church in Doesburg. Catholics could, of course, claim that the church had to endure that lightning strike in 1717 to punish the Reformers, more than a hundred years after the Reformation took place in Doesburg. God might not have realised it immediately. The so-called heretics, on the other hand, could claim that, to protect their place of worship, they have more faith in physics than in dogmatic symbols.

"Father, I fear you are guilty of sinful thoughts," Jean-Jacques remarks with slight irony.

"It's just a thought, so it's not an actual sin," Jan ripostes.

"I'm not so sure about that, dear," says Madeleine. "If I've read my Van den Bossche correctly, an actual sin is something you do or don't do of your own free will. If thinking also means "doing something", then you're already committing a sin simply by giving a thought to that heretical invention."

"Yes, yes," Tiene teases, "look, Jan. It's clearly written here: '*Q. How many things are necessary for actual sin ?*

*A. Three: first, that we do or refrain from doing anything with our will against the will of God.*

*Secondly, that we do it voluntarily, that is to say, that it is in the power of our will to do or to refrain from doing.*

*Thirdly, that we do it with some knowledge of evil, or that we can and*

*should know evil sufficiently.’ I don’t think you’ll escape of this easily.”*

Jean-Jacques continues to join in: “It’s even worse, Father. I’d even say you’re guilty of a venial sin, if we bring Saint Augustine into the picture. A minor sin, but dangerous if you don’t confess. Listen!” Jean-Jacques reads aloud:

“ ‘Q. What is a venial sin?

A. St. Augustine says that sin is whatever one freely speaks, does, or desires against the eternal Law, or the will of God. Lib. 22. contra Faust. chap. 27.

*Here is also described daily sin, if one adds to that word against, or outside of the eternal Law, etc. For although daily sin does not actually conflict with the Law of God, as it despises it and breaks God’s friendship, it is nevertheless somewhat outside the requirement of the eternal Law and the will of God.*

*This description of sin also includes those sins committed against the lawful commandments of men, which we are bound to obey, whether spiritual or secular; for the bond of their laws, or commandments, has its origin in the eternal law of God. S. Th. 1. 2. q .95. a. 2.*

*This description of sin also includes the sin of neglecting what the eternal Law commands to do, speak, or desire. 1 Corinthians 1:2, 71, a, 6, ad 1.”*

“That passage is very interesting,” Gertrude thinks. “Here the compiler doesn’t just quote the Bible. Augustine is allowed to explain what sin is in God’s name in his argument against Faustus, in book 22, paragraph 27. In the Spanish version of Augustine’s works, it clearly states: ‘Sin is a deed, saying, or desire that goes against eternal law.. Saying or wishing is already sinful.’ But what struck me is that the Catholic educator is advised to better follow Saint Thomas, who immediately makes even worldly human law dependent on divine law.”

Tiene and Madeleine look up: “That is indeed a far-reaching passage,” Madeleine agrees. “Here, the Catholic Pedagogue and

teacher clearly indicates that the world order is God's will and that as a poor sinner, you must obey the laws of the powerful. The only consolation is that those daily sins don't directly bring God's wrath upon you, according to His Catholic representatives on earth." Van den Bossche answers the question, "*'What are venial sins? These are sins which, though they displease God, nevertheless do not deprive a man of the state of grace and friendship of God, and which are easily forgiven, and into which even pious people fall daily.'*"

Jean-Jacques resumes: "So, someone can easily get rid of venial sins; confession is sufficient. I don't know if the indulgence market still exists, but for these kinds of sins, buying off is probably unnecessary. What the educator should really be concerned with is explaining any mortal sin. That's a serious business, so it's better to involve a prophet. I read: *'It is a sin that spiritually kills the human soul, as the Prophet Ezekiel says: "The soul that sins shall die." For this sin deprives the soul of its supernatural life, namely, the grace of God, and places it in a state of eternal damnation. We have already spoken of mortal sin, and said that it is a transgression of God's Commandment, either by deed or by thought, whereby we are robbed of sanctifying grace, become enemies of God, and are liable to eternal fire. What concerns it now can be seen and heard from the remainder of this Lesson..'*

I noticed that the entire chapter on mortal sin consists of examples based on circular reasoning, supplemented by rhetorical syllogisms whose first premise is often a dogmatic proposition. Of course, a good believer shouldn't doubt the correctness of such a proposition. Then the text continues speaking of *cardinal sins*. Being guilty of them is no small beer either. Just as I read other parts of the text, I got the feeling that the Catholic educator as preceptor won't have much success trying to convince his students not to sin. Look at the cardinal sin of greed, not to mention impurity. In response to the question '*What is greed?*' follows the answer of Thomas Aquinas: '*It is an irregular or excessive desire for temporal wealth. S. Th. 2. 2. q.*

118. a.1.' Avarice is not only the fear of losing possessions, but also the desire to be rich and powerful, which, according to Van den Bossche, only brings injustice and evil. He uses the Bible to give it the character of a cardinal sin: '*Because the desire to become rich and powerful, or the fear of losing our possessions, is the cause of many injustices and other evils, of which this sin is the origin: therefore the Wise Man says: Eccl. 10, 8, 9. There is nothing worse than a covetous man; and the Apostle Paul, Eph. 5, 8, 5, calls covetousness a slavery to idols.*' Worse still is what comes from greed. This book for the Catholic educator teaches us this, and I quote: '*Q. What are the sprouts of avarice? A. These six: insolence, anxiety of heart, deceit in words and deeds, violence, false oaths, treason.*' Isn't that unfortunately what we see happening so often? At any conflict, but also after every conflict? Don't the rulers make a habit of signing treaties only to abandon them? Don't they swear false oaths profusely? Don't they constantly commit treason?" Jean-Jacques is getting a little excited.

Karel can't help but say: "We may rightly wonder whether these nobles and other powerful figures can even manage without indulgences. Another question we might ask, is whether they are actually interested in eternal salvation. Thomas More describes Utopia as a place where there is no personal property. This is certainly no coincidence, although we may doubt whether he had many followers, either among his Catholic friends or among those who supported Henry VIII's nascent Church of England."

Elise laughs: "I don't believe any of us harbour desires to be rich and powerful. But I'm curious which leaders and property owners will have their relationship with God right after the final judgment. Or do they think they can easily bribe Him? Do they really think He's so naive?"

At the end of February, there was news from Lille. The winter months hampered correspondence. Both the American scientist

Benjamin Franklin, serving in diplomatic service in Paris, and his French colleague de Montredon still believe that the months-long anomalous temperature and precipitation patterns are related to the Icelandic volcanic eruptions. Traffic between Lille and Ghent has now resumed, although the sudden thaw is causing considerable flooding.

*Dear children,*

*It's been a while since we've had any news from Oostende. I imagine you've also been affected by these cold winter months. How are Jean-Jacques and Elise's projects going? That's his wife's name, isn't it? And you? Is the new couple you're working with going well? And have you been able to complete the expansion of your school building now that you're living on that new Keizerskaai?*

*We're struggling a bit here. Dieudonné suffered greatly from the heat and the yellow haze this autumn. Many people here in Lille have been seriously ill. The onset of cold hasn't improved the situation. Jan, your father is having increasingly frequent, severe coughing fits, and your brothers and I are quite concerned about his general health. He's wheezing. He says that old carts have squeaky axles, and that everything will be alright.*

*We hear from Paris that balloons are increasingly flying over the city these days. People call them Montgolfier balloons. You already know that the Montgolfier brothers continue to experiment with their hot air balloon. I heard that Benjamin Franklin, who is still in France defending the Free American States, is already dreaming of a balloon trip to Ireland. We hear a lot of good things about this American, although it's also said that he moves in circles that are not well-disposed towards either the church or the king. This may have something to do with his reputation as one of the founders of the young independent American states. According to friends who know him personally, he also wants to end slavery, but that would make him less popular even in America...*

*Do you remember François de Robespierre, Jan, and Madeleine? Friends from the nearby town of Arras tell us that his son is not only following in his father's footsteps as lawyer but he is also a poet. He just won a prize in Metz. François was a little older than you and once*

*studied in Douai, where he was taught, among others, by a fellow student of Pierre. His wife died of her fifth childbirth, and François never recovered from that. He moved to a German city shortly afterward, and it's said he died there a few years ago. Anyway. What we heard from our friends is that Maximilien (named after his grandfather) spent most of his childhood with his grandparents, and also belongs to the people of the robe. He is said to be, or to have been, a judge at the Episcopal Court. I say "was" because apparently he resigned after speaking out against sentencing a criminal to death. It is unclear to us whether he is against the death penalty in general, or only against sentencing certain criminal acts to death, such as those against the Church. Your brother Karel's wife, Jan, once stayed with Charlotte, one of François' daughters, in the same institution for young women of high standing and without much financial means. She is trying to find out more. Maximilien, like his father, apparently attaches little importance to the Church as an institution. But unlike his father, he is not in favour of a king with too much power. You can already understand why we are interested in learning more about him.*

*Dear children, we hope for less fickle weather in the coming weeks. That would be good for Dieudonné's health. I try to convince him now and then that the wind-blown sea air might be good for him now that Lille is often covered in chimney smoke, but he refuses to hear of a move to Oostende.*

*I hug you all.*

It seems that balloons are a topic of conversation in many places. Elise's parents mention that the Count of Arenberg is conducting extensive experiments with gases at his castle in Heverlee when filling balloons. At the University of Leuven, Professor Minckelers believes that fluorescing gas is the solution to increasing the balloons' lift.

The balloon craze also reached Oostende, where a *Hot air balloon* was already launched on February 8.

At the Bruges horse market in April, Elise and Jean-Jacques hear how balloons are rekindling superstition. As elsewhere, many here

believe they are the cause of last year's strange weather phenomena. Some vehemently claim that the moon could be permanently eclipsed by those balloons increasingly filling the sky, or perhaps people have already forgotten what happened a good month ago? The moon turned red and then disappeared for almost an hour. Anyone who tells this story and attributes the moon's disappearance to balloons is met with laughter from others: the moon disappears from time to time, and that has nothing to do with balloons, but with sinful behaviour on Earth! Others, in turn, find that funny. More serious, the sun could also disappear again, and not just in a bit of fog or mist like last year. No, the sun would simply stop shining. Few visitors to the Bruges market will ever know how such a solar eclipse two months earlier sowed panic among the slave population on the island colonies of our northern neighbours in the Caribbean Sea.

Here and now, Jean-Jacques is getting worked up. How is it possible that there's still so much ignorance about a phenomenon as easily explained and predictable as an eclipse, a phenomenon that even the oldest almanacs mentioned! Perhaps it's not just ignorance. Perhaps people simply want to believe in fairy tales...

The Hazegras parish isn't far from Keizerskaai. One afternoon in May, Jan walks in that direction. He wants to see for himself the construction site for the new smelter where whalers will bring in the blubber to be processed into oil. Uncle Johannes told him about this new company, co-financed by a Brussels banker who is one of his acquaintances. The family remains interested in further investing in activities related to the sea and fishing. After a cordial conversation with the business partner of Johannes' acquaintance, Jan walks home lost in thought. It's not just the investment in the company that interests him. He'd like to consult with the shipowners Ingelet and Jozef Pieterszoon and with Boudewijn and Gertrude's parents. The shipping company is a good investment

now that their maritime activities have increased significantly. Perhaps he can even convince Boudewijn and Gertrude not to completely abandon their family history. He cheerfully opens the living room door to talk to Madeleine about these new plans. But then he sees her looking up at him, tearfully, while holding several sheets of paper in her hand. She hands him the letter, which he reads with trembling hands:

*Dear brother,*

*I hope you won't be alone when you receive my letter. I know you're already feeling anxious, wondering why Karel is writing to me so soon after a letter from Mother. Yes, dear brother, you're allowed to look anxious. What I have to write to you isn't pleasant at all. It's about our father. I know Mother wrote to you that he was having trouble breathing after the hot summer and cold winter of last year. Lille certainly wasn't spared from the yellow fog, and many families have to mourn the deaths caused by epidemics primarily due to those weather conditions. Since the beginning of this year, we've regularly urged him to move to the coast or at least seek out more ventilated places, now that Father was having trouble breathing. But you know he's always been stubborn.*

*Dear brother, I know I must write to you about what's coming. Forgive me for finding it so difficult. Our dear father, Jan, passed away on May 6th. I know it's hard to read this, and it's hard to say it this way, Jan.*

*The days following his death were far from easy. And we didn't see that sudden end coming, otherwise Mother would have written to you about it in the previous letter. Nothing indicated that he was struggling any more than last year. Sometimes he'd have a violent coughing fit, but afterward, it seemed like things were better for a while. On May 5th, we visited Madeleine's parents. We had a pleasant evening with a good glass of wine. Everything seemed normal. As had often been the case lately, Mother got up earlier than he did the next day. She went to discuss the day's tasks with the housekeeper and was surprised that Father hadn't shown up yet. When she returned to the bedroom, she found him lifeless in bed.*

*Mother is trying to stay strong, but I can tell she's listless. She's*

worried about what will happen to her. Her friends keep claiming that both she and her father have made quite a few enemies in French power circles, but that even rebels don't appreciate their sometimes radical stance on property and arrogance. All of France seems like a huge powder keg right now, honestly! You can tell people are becoming increasingly suspicious of each other.

In short, Mother prefers not to stay in Lille now that Father is gone. I understand how they spoke and lived together as a kind of two-person unit, according to their own ethical interpretation of humanism. They prepared every conversation, every meeting, every text together. Now that she's on her own, she feels weak and threatened. I've discussed this with my wife at length. We think the best thing we can do is accompany Mother and come to Oostende.

While I'm writing the letter you're reading now, Mother is already writing to Aunt Maria. She's proposing to move in with her. We're still figuring out what to do next. We'd like to accompany Mother to Oostende, but we probably won't stay there. We're considering the Northern Netherlands or Cambridge. Could you help us with your contacts? Our brother will stay in Lille and manage the family's assets. That seems like a good solution to me, what do you think?

Dear Jan, I know you've been deeply upset by what I wrote today, and I'm sorry I'm already referring to the future after Dad's passing. I hope you both find strength in the many memories you and Madeleine have of our dear father, and that we can hug each other again soon. I would have preferred a large family gathering with him, but it wasn't meant to be. I eagerly await your reply.

Your brother Karel.

Dear Karel,

I can't express the state your letter left Madeleine and myself in. It's difficult to lose someone so suddenly. All we can say is that we'll try to welcome Mother, your wife, your daughter, and yourself as best we can. Yesterday, Aunt Maria visited us. She's already making plans to redecorate her home so Mother can feel at home as soon as possible. She sincerely hopes she'll find a comforting friend for her. It could be. I know they always exchanged letters, and that they both maintained a strong bond with Begga de Bruges.

*Madeleine and I would be delighted to welcome the three of you as long as you wish to stay in Oostende. We would also be happy to assist you with any further relocation plans you may have. I say “possibly” because who knows, you might find life in Oostende so pleasant that you decide to stay. And in that case, we are, of course, also happy to assist you.*

*I think it would be wise for our brother to look after the family assets in Lille. I would, however, recommend that you make clear agreements before you leave and consult Madeleine’s brother. As Mother knows, he has taken over Father Lacour’s business, and he will certainly ensure that everything is properly arranged legally. Let it be clear to you that we have no claim on anything and that we would prefer that you work out an arrangement that will give Mother and yourself some financial security for the next few years, until all the major changes in your lives are behind us.*

*Dear brother, see you soon, here in Oostende.*

Summer has begun. It’s time for the first of this year’s two Ostend fairs. Jan and his brother Karel are observing. The number of families who have come over from France is gradually increasing. Besides the Ostend dialect, you hear a lot of French, and the accent clearly shows that these are people from the border region. According to Karel, Parisians who get too hot under their feet are moving to larger cities like London or Amsterdam, or even cities in the Rhine region. There is also a significant increase in exiles towards the Confederation of the XIII Cantons. Although things are sometimes turbulent elsewhere, the large universities attract humanists and city dwellers. The two brothers walk up the dike near the lighthouse and meet William Hasketh. He is enthusiastic because this year, in addition to bathing carts, he will also be allowed to keep a *cabane temporaire* on the beach to sell refreshments to sea bathers. The Ostend magistrate has just given him permission to do so. Oostende is a busy place these days, not only with French or Dutch tourists, but also, and especially, with Englishmen who sail across the North Sea and spend some time

here. The port development promoted by Emperor Joseph II is not strange to this. But not everything the emperor decrees is peaceful. Major protests erupt against the future ban on burying people within the city centers. Few understand this concerns a health measure. Many consider it an attack on the family privileges of those who wish to be buried in or near the central church.

In mid-September Jan heard that Freemasons were uniting in *la loge des Trois Niveaux établies à l'Orient d'Ostende* and he discretely wonders if his brother is involved. The lodge is international but has a Roman Catholic character, making his brother's involvement rather unlikely. He doesn't speak to Karel directly about it, knowing he would only receive evasive answers. Meanwhile, and despite their interest in the schoolhouse on Keizerskaai, the three decide to move further north. They will settle in Utrecht, where Karel can work as a researcher at the university. Officially, women are still not allowed in higher education, but his wife and unmarried daughter will be able to work with Karel there without being pointed at. They want to map the first generation of entrepreneurs and businesses of the last century. They want to look for trends and see if there are any possible deviations in public male-female relations.

At the end of November, Jan misses his brother's company a little when he visits the second annual Ostend fair. It's a family walk, though, because Jean-Jacques and Elise are in Oostende for the occasion. Together with Jean-Jacques' parents, grandmother Mathilde, and great-aunt Maria, they walk towards the dike and the sea. The beach is wintry and deserted. No bathing carts or Hasketh refreshment tents. However, quite a few people are walking between the high-tide line and the sea's edge, trying to catch soft-shell clams.

During their walk, the Emperor's new decrees are discussed.

"I think the Emperor is venturing into dangerous territory with his edict secularising marriage," Mathilde believes.

"In any case, he will have quite a few bishops against him in one fell swoop," Elise thinks.

"And not just bishops. This will surely not please the traditional families that often produce high-ranking church figures," Jan adds. "The church is clearly losing some of its power here, because the obstacles it normally imposes no longer have to be taken into account, especially regarding the annulment of marriages. Wasn't that the origin of the Church of England? And this time, no one is consulting or attacking the Pope; it's simply assumed that marriage between two people is not a divine but a civil matter. I fear that after the pub and tavern hysteria, the fuss surrounding the burials, invisible resistance is emerging alongside the visible opposition of the bishops, as invisible as that lunar eclipse that suddenly occurred in midday in August."

"Your comparisons are as far-fetched as your father's back then," Mathilde notes with a wistful smile, "but I think you're right. And the Court is certainly not being cautious now that it has also made it clear that it will ban Ultramontane influences from theological education and that monastic orders must be less dependent on Rome."

Jean-Jacques adds: "I'm curious to see what will happen to education in general, which has been controlled by the Church to this day. Elise's father told us about the preparations to send all seminarians to an imperial seminary in Leuven. Right now, all teaching appointments are being brought under imperial control."

"Now that we're talking about the Court, I unfortunately don't know much about its artistic life. But I do know that the Emperor is still the great patron of the Vienna Opera and holds Wolfgang Mozart in high regard," Maria reflects. "Did you know that the Emperor's youngest brother, the current Archbishop and Elector of Cologne, has since hired the musical prodigy Beethoven? He's 13 now and has already written a piano concerto, as I heard from one of the ladies-in-waiting to the Governor Maria-Christina."

“How can we attract more music and theater to Oostende?” Madeleine wonders. “It would benefit the children. Unfortunately even in church good music is still scarce. Not to mention opera and chamber music.”

“Jean-Jacques and I are trying to incorporate more artistic development into our Bruges schoolhouse,” says Elise. “We’re in contact with a society, but it’s always difficult to convince adults to open their doors and let children see and hear chamber music. Moreover, if these children don’t come from the upper middle class and aristocracy, everyone immediately assumes there will be stealing. We do expect support from Bishop Brenart, after we had an audience with him. My father knows him since he regularly visited Leuven for his studies on the history of the Catholic Church in the Southern Netherlands. As a humanist, he clearly expresses his concern about the abuse of power over the ignorant, partly by being lax about superstition. *Sine Minerva Nihil, Nothing without Science,*” is his episcopal motto. You can interpret this in many ways, of course, but still. Furthermore, it seems to me that he was influenced by the recently deceased Prince-Bishop of Liège, François-Charles de Velbrück. “He not only did a lot of work to further establish schools for the poor — yes, I know this doesn’t necessarily mean that it was education on par with what the aristocracy received— ” Elise adds, seeing Madeleine’s reaction, “but he also dedicated himself to music and painting.”

“Just like Claudio Cardinalis back then, there are also bishops and church officials today who find humanism and the ideas of humanist philosophers interesting and partly adopt them,” Mathilde begins. “But we shouldn’t overestimate the impact of this on the poor and the common people. As your father and grandfather made clear when he analysed the writings of thinkers like Voltaire, Rousseau, and even Hume, with whom he had personal contact, humanism is very much a matter of position. Few humanists have devoted the same attention to the poor and slaves as to the

dissemination of scientific thought among the aristocracy, the nobility, and the wealthy middle class.

In one of the first letters Karel sent from Utrecht, he recounts that the Roman Catholic priests in the villages surrounding the city continued to protest against the use of the Heidelberg Catechism. They likely preferred to continue using the Mechelen Catechism compiled by the Jesuits, even now that the order had been officially dissolved. But what I really wanted to say is that, according to what Karel learned, in the Utrecht villages, taken together, slightly more than five out of ten Roman Catholic men could write their names at their wedding. But among them, only three out of ten were day labourers, and seven out of ten were farmers or artisans. Among the followers of the Reformed Church, three out of four men could write their names, one out of two of whom were day labourers or poor. Of course, one does not know whether the villages surrounding the university city of Utrecht serve as models for all the provinces of the Northern Netherlands. And it's also difficult to know whether there's a direct connection with having attended school as a child."

"I think I understand what you're saying, Grandmother," says Jean-Jacques after a brief pause. "Besides, you can't tell whether someone who can write their name also possesses knowledge and science. We're aware that we need to look concretely at our work with children, rather than just listen to what's being announced. We try to interest key figures in our work, but we only truly learn from those who, like us, think about the best way to offer children the opportunity, over a long period of time, to connect their childlike interests with human knowledge."

When Jean-Jacques Lemaître and Elise Duchamp started their Bruges schoolhouse after the summer of 1785, Jean-Jacques had already gathered around him a fairly large circle of citizens who spent their free time acquiring knowledge. Thanks to some friends

of grandmother Mathilde who emigrated to the Confederation of the XIII Cantons, the couple learned more about the schoolfarm of Johann Pestalozzi and Anna Schulthess. They received, in addition to the first two volumes of *Lienhard and Gertrud*, also a copy in the hands of *[Aufsätze über die Armenanstalt auf dem Neuhofe] Essays on the poorhouse at Neuhofe*. Jean-Jacques and Elise know that Rousseau is a source of inspiration for Johann Pestalozzi. But Jean-Jacques is very disappointed when he realises that Pestalozzi doesn't necessarily adhere to the old principle of Jan Amos Comenius of making everything available to everyone. As far as Jean-Jacques understands it, the pedagogue is primarily concerned with figuring out how to efficiently educate the poor to self-reliance. His claim that "*Der Arme muss zur Armut auferzogen werden*" is not directly a declaration to make knowledge and science available to everyone. In the essays about the poorhouse at Neuhof, Jean-Jacques reads, among other things: '*I have always believed that educating the poor is the primary task of an orphanage. The poor are poor primarily because they have not been educated to meet their needs. That resource must be drained. Besides the general education that applies to all people, the ultimate goal of educating the poor is to ensure that they find their place in their condition. The poor must be educated to be poor. To determine whether this is actually happening is the key to knowing whether an orphanage is truly good. Educating the poor requires a deep, accurate knowledge of the real needs, limitations, and circumstances of those living in poverty. It requires knowledge of the details of their likely condition in the future. One can truly say that every class of people must first and foremost seek its virtue. practices in response to the limitations, obstacles, and difficulties of old age. I believe that the essence of any profession's apprenticeship lies in patiently practicing the inherent difficulties and overcoming any desires that might hinder continued and uninterrupted activity in future major tasks(2)'.*' Elise notes that Johann Pestalozzi apparently interprets Rousseau as meaning that to keep rural children happy, you shouldn't teach

them too much, but rather help them develop the skills to grow their own food on a plot of land. If, moreover, they can sell some of their harvest, they are certainly not subject to charity.

Apparently, Pestalozzi also doesn't see the dissemination of knowledge as a way to improve the lot of everyone, but instead continues to cling to the idea that everyone belongs in their own class or position, where they should be educated to lead a happy and virtuous life. He says of this: '*The philanthropist must descend into the lowest hut of misery, must see the poor man in his dark room, his wife in the smoky kitchen, and his child at the almost impossible daily labor. If these (orphaned) children lived with poor parents in poor huts, they would necessarily be so accustomed to all these restrictions that they would not be a burden; they could live peacefully and happily under these burdens. A good educational institution should not deprive them of this peace and contentment. And that would be precisely the case if the philanthropist who wants to educate poor children were not sufficiently familiar with poverty and its inherent resources*(3)'."

At Neuhof, the education of the vagrant children was primarily practical and focused on weaving, spinning, and small-scale agriculture, supplemented by the simple lessons of the small school. But that form of *Selbstbefreiung durch das Wissen*, self-liberation through knowledge wasn't that evident for Pestalozzi himself, Jean-Jacques thinks, considering that Neuhof had to close in 1780 after being declared insolvent. Meanwhile, Johann and Anna are busy with new educational projects, while the children of the 70s are working as young adults in local industry for starvation wages. Whether they are as happy as Johann and Anna claim, is difficult to determine.

In principle, it's certainly worthwhile to encourage self-reliance and thus prevent someone from becoming dependent on charity. Jean-Jacques knows how a good heart often makes people dependent. But is Johann Pestalozzi's proposal to teach the poor to be poor the only way to avoid that charity? What he ultimately proposes is to

educate unhappy poor people to become happy poor: ‘*The poor child’s nursery should resemble its future living room as much as possible. I shudder at the misery that befalls the unfortunate when they perish as a result of unwise charity, which will leave them weeping under the weight of unknown poverty, weeping as they eat their bread, as I see them languish today like sickly children. Truly, my heart, too, cherishes that burning warmth, that love for the well-being, for the greatest possible well-being, of these abandoned ones; but I see this only happening through extreme acclimation to the strictest restrictions, by providing the absolutely necessary education to be able to work in the most promising industry. This must go hand in hand with a serious and sustained habituation to all kinds of hardships of the country’s poor and to the discomfort of communal amusements.(4)’.”*

Isn’t that an easy solution? Jean-Jacques talks to Elise about it. She picked up a copy from *Politique Naturelle* from Mathilde after their last visit to Oostende. Although the book doesn’t name an author, insiders are convinced it’s a work by Baron D’Holbach, known for his salon debates where philosophy is the main ingredient. Therefore, Elise notes: “What strikes me most is that Johann Pestalozzi’s thinking preserves the absolute distinction between classes. And in this, he’s no different from Comenius or La Salle — wait a minute,” she adds, seeing Jean-Jacques reaction. “I know that Comenius and La Salle disagree on how to spread knowledge and science, but you have to accept that neither of them truly question the difference in social standing. Both simply acknowledge that difference. Comenius is simply more generous when it comes to informing everyone about what humanity knows. But I’m returning to Johann Pestalozzi. Although we live a hundred and fifty years after Comenius, he still clings to the premise of Démia, or La Salle, that the poor should learn less than the wealthy. Démia and La Salle proposed this simply because, in their view, the poor simply should know less than the wealthy and the aristocracy. Pestalozzi’s words reveal his concern for the poor to be happy. That seems to me a

liberal interpretation of the ‘Rousseauian’ idea of the happy ignorant. Of course, Démia and La Salle spoke from a Roman Catholic perspective and their submission to a dogma they themselves accepted absolutely. That is how I understand D’Holbach’s reasoning when he speaks of freedom of conscience and says: *‘To be free, it is not enough that the person and possessions of the Citizen are protected from oppression; it is also necessary that his mind freed from the chains of Tyranny, be able to freely follow the ideas that he judges to be true, useful, and necessary for his well-being. Men are religious, but not all in the same way. Religious divisions have the most terrible consequences, especially when the Sovereign Authority has the folly of wanting to put uniformity into sentiments that are not susceptible to it, or of claiming to regulate on its own, the conduct and ideas of the Subjects relative to something more respectable for them, than all human laws, than the Authority of Kings and than their own lives.’* According to D’Holbach, a sound state policy is one in which one particular faith or philosophy of life does not have supremacy over all others. The secular government must guarantee this freedom of thought. But such a guarantee is useless if you only have teaching priests who mislead and deceive people. And that, again according to D’Holbach, is precisely what they do. He literally says: *‘Deceitful or fanatical priests, far from instructing people, make them unsociable and turbulent. Distracted by such leaders, men rarely have healthy ideas of freedom, and behave like wild beasts to acquire or defend it.’*

I agree with D’Holbach when he says that you can’t expect much positive from such teachers. Moreover, D’Holbach claims: *‘With such teachers, the People acquire only a spirit of servitude, the habit of letting themselves be guided without reasoning, a fatal apathy for the most interesting objects of this world. The lessons of these masters speak to men neither of liberty, nor of love of the public good, nor of the ambition to deserve the esteem of one’s associates, nor of the activity necessary for social life; ... they only discourage man, ...’* And to answer what

you asked me about Johann Pestalozzi, yes, it seems to me that he at least proposes an easy solution. Let the poor live as poor, teach them to survive, and let them be happy with that. Don't foist a dogma on them that they then fanatically defend, but do as many priests do, and help them learn not to think. And to keep them happy, teach them to manage their condition better, preferably by advising them not to change their condition and ensuring they have no contact with other living conditions.

Elise and Jean-Jacques may never have known that, during the period they were discussing this, the Ostend school for orphans and abandoned children was requesting a tax exemption from the Central Government in Brussels on the white lace produced by the children, thus securing the entire country as a market. The argument was that the children would better support the school this way. It sounds like a Pestalozzi proposal.

The Ostend Company, long doomed to disappear, is now definitively gone. The trade in goods with Hamburg, which many had hoped for after seeing its development in the Northern Netherlands, initially failed to take off in the Southern Netherlands. This has improved considerably in recent years, and today Oostende increasingly supplies Hamburg with goods such as coffee, tea, sugar, rice, sago, tobacco, spices, hides, horn, and cotton, originating from overseas territories in both the East and West. Exports to these overseas territories, which made Oostende a world trading center during the recently concluded naval wars between Spain, France, the Netherlands, and England, are now declining. The same applies to the Austrian-supported enterprises of the *Asian Association of Trieste*, which, in addition to Trieste and Livorno, also supplies Oostende with colonial goods. Today, it is the internal difficulties of the ports of Nantes, Bordeaux, Marseille, and Le Havre that benefit the port of Oostende.

The Lesmeister and Lemaître families have meanwhile shifted

almost all their investments to local shipping, fishing, and seafood processing, and have almost completely eliminated their merchant navy interests.

## Knowing, a reserved privilege

It's unclear to the Lemaîtres whether Emperor Joseph II's policies were influenced by D'Holbach's ideas, but it is certain that the monarch intended to curtail the Church's monopoly on education. One could argue that the Pope even lent him a hand by dissolving the Jesuit Order. Secondary education, in particular, ended up in other hands. Furthermore, the Emperor naturally wanted reliable officials to better centralise the administration of the entire region. The abolition of episcopal seminaries and traditional priestly formation, followed by the establishment of a state-run General Seminary in Leuven with a branch in Luxembourg, has caused bad blood in *Belgium Austriacum*. The entire church leadership rebelled against Joseph II's intended formation of a humanist and pro-government priesthood. The influence of the conservative church leadership was strong enough to also cause the seminarians to rebel, and pamphlets attacking imperial policy appeared everywhere. Yet, the opposite was also seen. Texts defending the Emperor's policy were not only appearing among the seminarians. The Lemaître family and their friends and colleagues want to stay informed but quickly realise that these struggles ultimately have reduced impact on the little or first school. There is still a dire shortage of genuine children's books, and a strong divide remains between schools for the poor or orphans and the education of children from aristocratic and upper-middle-class backgrounds.

When Jan talks about this with his correspondents from Sluis, he receives an ironic answer from his friend:

*'Today in the Northern Netherlands we are witnessing the publication of De Proeve van Vaderlandse Gedichtjes voor Kinderen [The Sample of Dutch Poems for Children] by Van Ollefen. It might be a kind of personal punishment because we often begged for children's literature. We just forgot to clearly say what we meant by that...'*

*These poems will certainly serve to continue to perpetuate religious narrowing among young people. Imagine being able to make children complain that they're too young to fight against dissenters. See one of those gems:*

Father! I see with great pleasure,  
That you, for the good cause,  
You have bears weapons and must come forward.  
I am just a child, why?  
I would so much like to do something,  
to make the bastards succumb

*Believe it or not, Jan, but today our dream is even stronger to turn any of the Zeeland islands into a new Utopia. If you ever feel like helping to build such a world, let us know!*'

The news from Scotland is better. The *Thomas Braidwood's Academy* (See part 03: Publications out of control) let us know that a *Royal Society* fellowship was awarded to their former student John Goodricke. He became profoundly deaf during his childhood in Groningen, after contracting scarlet fever. His parents wisely sent him to Thomas Braidwood's school for the deaf. Thanks to the education he received there, he was able to work as an adult at his neighbour Edward Pigott's observatory in York. Together they studied the periodic variation of certain stars. The astronomers already knew about the existence of variable stars. This characteristic also aroused the interest of both men. A few years ago, John Goodricke succeeded in developing the calculations that could explain the observations after extensive observations of Algol. He hypothesised that Algol was in fact two stars orbiting each other and, as seen from Earth, regularly eclipsing each other. He received the annual Copley Medal for his work in May 1783. Unfortunately, he did not live to see his election as a Fellow. At only 24 years old, he died of illness four days after the election.

Jan and Madeleine see this story as the perfect illustration of what would be possible if all children received such support in their

learning process. John, who became deaf at a young age, was fortunate that his parents had both money *and* the knowledge decent education exists for deaf children. But the teaching couple believes that education shouldn't depend on luck, money, or chance knowledge, but should be available to everyone. They discuss this with friends of Karel at the '*loge des trois niveaux établies à l'Orient d'Ostende*'. The small international group focuses primarily on charitable work. Jan and Madeleine discuss projects like the Scottish school, aiming to demonstrate that charity can consist of donations that enable quality educational work, rather than directly helping the needy. This can also be a more useful response to charity that creates dependency than keeping the poor happy, as Johann Pestalozzi proposes.

Mathilde reflects on the spirit of the times. The widespread education of children is clearly on the rise, but it means little for the children of the people who work in spinning mills and weaving mills or who are deployed in the fields and fishing. The schoolhouse of her son and his team, and also that of her grandson and his wife, are commendable. But they are no more than two drops in the ocean. Everywhere she notices the contradiction between what many humanists and other free thinkers say when they discuss human rights and what often happens in practice. Whoever having power try to curtail the power of others, those who lack it, even among humanists, often limit themselves to wanting to take the place of those who wield power.

What happened in the Austrian Netherlands in early 1787 is a prime example. On January 1, the Court enacted two decrees with judicial and administrative reforms. Centralisation would bring uniformity and abolish numerous centuries-old privileges for local jurisdictions and courts. The government found itself in a bind because the ecclesiastical discontent about this was met with support from other social classes and groups. These were not

necessarily sympathetic to the ecclesiastical power, but reacted primarily because they felt threatened themselves. The often prominent families of the nobility saw the new decrees as a threat to their positions, remuneration, and social status, and felt part of their power base disappearing.

Mathilde fears that the ultimate result of these centralising decrees will be a strengthening of the Emperor's power, rather than a better, more widely controlled local government of the common good and of the people themselves.

She thinks of Nicolas de Caritat, who recently wrote again that he champions human rights in general, and more specifically the rights of women and people of color. That's certainly interesting. The Marquis sees the development of the young United States partly as the realisation of his ideas. He uses them as examples to propose political, economic, and administrative reforms for French society. According to Mathilde, he's thinking primarily of the governance of the Nation, while she questions the very concept of nationhood.

It sounds so simple when you hear it. The short and powerful preamble to the United States Constitution states: "*We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.*"

One can of course wonder who are "*we, the people*". Are these also the people of color and the women that Nicolas de Caritat is talking about? Is "*we, the people*" a paternalistic embrace of all European immigrants in America by the nation's founders? And what about the descendants of the population that preceded the European colonisers? Isn't that a dangerous principle to speak for those who have been deprived of their autonomy?

The Constitution of the Union of American States itself is also a beautiful, clear, and simple text.

Article 1 states that “*All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives*”. As Montesquieu prescribed, the legislative power is neatly separated from the executive power. This is immediately clear in Article 2: “*The executive Power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America; Before he enter on the Execution of his Office, he shall take the following Oath or Affirmation: ‘I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my Ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States’.*” God is not involved, nor is the Bible. Only kings need God to legitimise themselves. Here, the chosen one can decide for himself whether to affirm or to swear. It is about knowing the laws of humanity, made by humans together, and about appointing someone to ensure that everyone applies those laws.

But Mathilde has her doubts. How long will it be before the executive feels called upon to make the laws he wants to enforce? How long will it be before the swearing elected official once again invokes God’s will and oversight? That’s always a protective shield against those who accuse him of being too autocratic? And what about the freedom of the peoples of the rest of the planet? Isn’t that being compromised by the common defense that the American spokespeople incorporated into the Constitution?

Mathilde thinks further. Who is qualified to draft a constitution? Can a constitution serve humanity, or merely an artificially forged group of individuals into a nation? Does a constitution have a liberating or enslaving effect? Recently, Jean-Jacques gave her an excerpt to read from an epistle by Jan Baptiste Verlooy, who studied law in Leuven in the late 70s and is now a lawyer at the Council of Brabant. Verlooy, who clearly advocates reason, including in administrative matters, says he expects much from a constitution, as long as it is drafted and developed with the necessary care. According to him, good politics depends on a sound

structure, and a clear constitution guarantees that structure.

Verlooy's thoughts interest Mathilde. She is happy that Jan and Karel are joining the *Cercle Littéraire d'Ostende*. It's not a circle where you're likely to find fishermen or manual labourers, not even those whose sons and daughters frequent Keizerskaai. But the conversations the schoolhouse's initiators have with parents of students keep them informed about current political ideas and the latest news from science and technology. Some members seek out the *Circle* only to read the newspaper. But Jan and Karel like to visit the *Groot Cafféhuys* held by Pieter Salzgeber on the corner of Apestraat and Comediestraat, where the *Circle* holds its meetings in the spacious room of the coffee house.

From 1788 onward, a turbulent period begins. This is clearly related to the growing alienation between the old nobility on the one hand, and the aristocracy and wealthy bourgeoisie on the other. The poor living conditions, especially of the urban population, also has an impact. Farmers far better than urban workers and craftsmen. Quite a few people from the farming community even managed to send their sons to the seminary or the University of Leuven.

The Lemaître family will leave the Austrian Netherlands once more in the coming years to settle temporarily in Sluis. But they're not so far yet. The schoolhouse continues to function well. Last year, Jean-Jacques and Elise's Bruges Schoolhouse expanded its offering of educational activities for children and young adults, both boys and girls. Elise is pregnant. This is a good reason for Mathilde and Maria to spend some time in Bruges.

Shortly before Mathilde disappears to Bruges, she discusses with Jan the pros and cons of the far-reaching regional power still wielded by most local lords and clergy. Although they both detest the idea of a strong central authority and see the danger posed by absolutist monarchs, they do not immediately entertain the

romantic fantasy that everything local is necessarily better. Indeed, there are many local abuses of those with power over those without. They are thinking not only of political power or religious dominance, but also of large property owners. Those generally do not set sound ethical examples. And they always return to the same point: without a long, mixed, and rigorous education that incorporates knowledge and scholarship, develops critical thinking, and emphasises the need to think beyond immediate peaceful coexistence in negotiations, local power can be just as corrosive and detrimental to human relations as absolute central power.

Mother and son believe such an educational process can also ease tensions between traditional local authorities and the central government. The arrogance of both sides makes local authorities resistant to centrally announced reforms. The former consider any initiative from the central government as interference and an infringement of the relative independence that principalities and cities have enjoyed for centuries. But changing such attitudes through a thorough educational process takes time.

Mother and son remember all too well the resistance in all the Provincial Councils, first in Hainaut, then in Brabant, and also in Flanders. There was massive protest from countless institutions and administrations. But even those who stood to gain from curbing the power of local potentates caused riots. This led to the establishment of urban militias to maintain order. The governors Albert of Saxony-Teschen and Maria Christina, sister of the emperor, were shocked by the protest. They advised the emperor to reconsider some measures, but the stubborn Joseph II stood firm. As a result, he achieved the opposite of what he intended: more, rather than less, discontent. Moreover, it seemed as if his government was increasingly losing its grip on events. In Oostende it is reported that civilians in Antwerp even died during the armed evacuation of the episcopal seminary.

Ultimately, the Emperor gave in to some judicial and administrative

demands, but he refused to negotiate any further on the ecclesiastical reforms.

At the end of May, there's good news from Bruges. Mathilde informs Jan and Madeleine, and Elise's parents, that they have a handsome grandson. The birth wasn't too difficult, and Elise is recovering quickly. The little boy seems to be doing well, despite the name his parents chose for him, Mathilde adds with some irony. It became Lodewijk. His great-grandmother wonders how you can explain in France that a Jean-Jacques chooses a Louis! But Jean-Jacques smiles and says she's completely wrong. Originally, Lodewijk means *free fighter*. And that's what they hope their son will be. Jean-Jacques and Elise can hardly imagine that the name Lodewijk will later cause some headaches.

In early July, Maria and Mathilde return to Oostende. They hadn't been home long when the entire region is hit by a very violent windstorm. On July 13th, it even had the characteristics of a large whirlwind. A few weeks later, it is learned that the storm had caused enormous damage, not only in Flanders, Zeeland, and Holland, but especially in Île-de-France, Picardy, and Artois. Wind and hail destroyed the almost ripe grain in very large areas and people are preparing for a shortage of flour and bread. Mathilde heard from friends in Paris that small uprisings are already emerging due to the speculation on the price of flour had already begun.

Mathilde also learns that the Edict of Versailles came into effect at the beginning of this year. Formally, this was intended to end discrimination against many non-Catholics. The Edict did, however, reaffirm the Catholic Church as the state church, allowing Catholics to retain a number of privileges over Calvinists, Lutherans, and Jews. In reality, the edict is more of an arrangement between the French monarch and the Pope concerning ecclesiastical matters. The French Catholic Church thus recognises the Pope's authority as

head of the Church but enforces conditions that favours the French king's authority. The Church acquires a distinct national identity characterised by considerable autonomy from the Pope. Meanwhile, Minister Étienne Charles de Loménie de Brienne calls for a general French Estates-General, which would begin on May 1, 1789. According to Mathilde's friends, this reveals the existing tensions between those seeking more power for the King and those seeking to abolish absolute power.

Mathilde recalls the conversation with her son a few months ago. She sees a parallel here with what's happening in the Austrian Netherlands, despite the two monarchs' differing approaches. The central government wants to tackle church and religious freedom, but also gain control over local power. She doesn't know what the Estates-General will actually mean for the Third Estate in France. The reforms of Emperor Joseph II seem clearer in that regard, or at least are perceived as such. According to Jan, this explains the support the Emperor enjoys from the rural population. Reducing urban tax breaks, guilds, and market rights is very popular, especially in rural areas where cottage industries are still prevalent. People are also more suspicious of the Brabant patriots who constantly incite resistance. This provocation is primarily the work of conservative administrators who want to safeguard their own privileges and mislead the unsuspecting population. On the other hand the movement led by Jan Frans Vonck is said to be aimed at increasing the power of the city's notables. Yet, in Schorisse and Avelgem, among other places, there is a certain sympathy for the fiscal rebellion against the State of Flanders.

"You think we're heading for dark times again?" Madeleine asks Mathilde.

"I fear so. Everything points in that direction. We feel the tension rising. I must honestly say that I think Emperor Joseph II is disastrously steering in the right direction. Many minor rulers don't appreciate his reforms," Mathilde replies.

“I agree with Mathilde,” says Karel. “And I fear that those local authorities, with the support of poorly trained pastors, will succeed in rallying to their side a large part of the population who have barely received any education, or only attended the most meagre little school.”

“Yes,” Boudewijn believes, “it is now clear that one needs a great deal of reasoning to understand the true nature of the arguments for and against the Emperor’s measures.”

“Not to mention how to understand the Emperor’s own actions,” laughs Tiene. “You’d need a whole flock of owls for that!”

“A flight of owls,” Gertrude wonders.

Mathilde smiles. “We recently received a document that may be come from the *Order of the Perfectibles*,” she begins.

“And in that we could learn how that *Illuminati* still hold knowledge in high regard,” Gertrude continues. “They use Minerva’s owl on an open book as a symbol of recognition. And that made me think: we’ll need many owls to illuminate the dark times with wisdom...”

“A poetic view of our times,” says Jan.

“Yes,” Madeleine begins, “when you speak like that, we can confirm that you are not among those who neglect their mother tongue. A good point for the schoolhouse...”

Everyone is laughing.

Madeleine is of course thinking about the *Verhandeling op d’Onacht der moederlyke Tael in de Nederlanden* [*Treatise on the Nightingale of the Motherly Language in the Netherlands*] which was just published anonymously. The Lemaître family, like many others, strongly suspects that the text is by Jan Verlooy.

“Why Jan Verlooy?” asks Boudewijn.

“If we read that treatise alongside texts we know are by Jan Verlooy, we see strong parallels, I think,” says Jan. “He doesn’t demonstrate a political territorial connection to the customs and language of every region. He shows a compassion for the people of the people, and it’s clear that he has a great deal of sympathy for

the more radical ideas coming over from France. That aligns quite well with the tone of the treatise.”

Madeleine says: “If I understand him at all, for Verlooy, national sovereignty also means popular sovereignty. He seems to endorse Rousseau, who withdraws supreme authority from the king and grants it to the people.”

Mathilde asks: “So he thinks everyone can represent oneself, in a direct democracy?”

Madeleine replies: “No, I don’t think he follows Rousseau so unconditionally. He’s more in favour of popular representation than self-representation.”

Boudewijn asks: “So you think Verlooy is closer to Montesquieu?”

“That seems more likely to me, yes,” Madeleine agrees. “He’s more pragmatic about representation than those who advocate for self-government and self-representation.”

“But in the meantime, I do have my reservations about what the unrest will entail,” Mathilde continues. “I don’t want to sound a harbinger of doom, but I think the incitement against Emperor Joseph II won’t lead to much good... let’s hope I’m wrong.”

The winter is once again very cold. Around New Year’s Day, the minimum temperature in the Austrian Netherlands fluctuates between 16 and 19 degrees negative Réaumur (20 to 24 degrees negative Celsius). In France, this cold winter, combined with the increasingly noticeable flour shortage, is, according to some, only fuelling the unrest. The Lemaîtres are keeping themselves informed and preparing to welcome family or friends should they flee France. Despite the freezing cold, the friends from Sluis are in Oostende to celebrate Christmas with the Lemaîtres. They report that the school system is increasingly keeping its schoolmasters under control. A recurring phenomenon was the questionable morals of many among them: fornication, drunkenness, and public brawling had long been addressed, but with varying degrees of success. Many schoolmasters

neglected their teaching duties in the process. Schools were often closed prematurely. The Church Fathers are also concerned about the poor adherence to the catechism. The good news is that there is finally a downward trend in the discipline of schoolmasters. The gradually improving education is apparently having a positive effect. The recruitment of new schoolmasters is also being taken more seriously. Compensation is still meagre, but here too, a slight improvement is being seen. In short, school education is on the rise in the Northern Netherlands.

During those Christmas days, the whole family is together. Jan and Madeleine transformed one of the library rooms into a cozy seating area. Family and friends all found a place to sit.

“Grandmother, don’t you have a story for us?” asks Jean-Jacques. Mathilde thinks for a moment. “Have I told you about the gnomon of St. Sulpice?” she asks.

“What’s a gnomon?” asks Gertrude.

“It’s a kind of orienting indicator. The cast shadow follows a specific path, depending on the apparent movement of the sun. By observing that shadow, you can tell each day when the sun is at its highest point, and therefore precisely when it’s noon. You could set a clock by it,” Jean-Jacques explains.

Mathilde begins: “Exactly. But the Saint-Sulpice sundial isn’t a true gnomon. It’s actually a south-north line drawn on the ground, on which a spot of light falls. In the stained-glass window above the line, there’s a small hole about 80 feet above the ground. The sun shines through there, creating the spot of light.”

In the first half of this century, Jean-Baptiste Languet de Gergy was the pastor of Saint-Sulpice. In 1727, he wanted to measure the “true noon” himself, on site, to know exactly when the bells should ring. A pendulum clock wasn’t enough to observe true noon at the site of Saint-Sulpice Church. It gives the average noon time and doesn’t account for variations in solar noon. These variations are due to

fluctuations in the Earth's axial rotation. You should know that current scientific observations show that the Earth's rotation and the oscillation of its axis can explain all the apparent motions of the sun. In practice, in Saint-Sulpice, up to 16 minutes must be added or subtracted from the pendulum time to determine noon for that location. Gergy wanted De Sully to put into practice in the church what he wrote about separate time and equivalent time to regulate clocks and to make it the noon clock reference for all of Paris. But De Sully died a year later, and in 1729 the Paris Observatory had a visible meridian from which the mean noon could be precisely determined. Yet..."

"Wasn't that calculation an admission that Galileo was right?" Boudewijn interrupts. "Didn't that put the pastor in conflict with the Church?"

Mathilde agrees and continues: "When Gergy originally expressed his wish, the idea that the Earth moves would have been against the Church. That's why it might have been easier to entrust these kinds of measurements to a physics institute. The priest could, of course, argue that he wanted to record the movement of the sun, not that of the Earth. And Jean-Baptiste de Gergy persists.

In 1742, he presented a revised proposal. Besides determining the correct noon, he also wanted to conduct a detailed study of the Easter equinox: *Ad Certiorum Paschalis Aequinoctii Exploratorium* he later had it placed on the pedestal of the gnomon.

Yet this too is more of a scientific than a religious concern. As you may know, the Christian obsession with the precise date of Easter is twofold: on the one hand, they want to know the exact moment of the resurrection. This moment corresponds to Pessach, the Jewish celebration of the liberation of the Hebrew people from Egyptian slavery. It must be remembered that Jesus was a Jew and that he also celebrated this important date with his disciples. However, Jews determine Pessach using a 12-month lunar-solar calendar that follows the lunar cycles, supplemented by a varying thirteenth

month to track the annual orbit of the sun. For Jews, Pessach is quite easily fixed on the full moon of the first vernal lunar month, Nisan 14.

Today, the authorities of places where Christians live use a 12-month calendar. The number of days in each month varies, regardless of the lunar cycles. Therefore, a different time calculation is used to observe Easter. Of course, even at the time of the Council of Nicaea, it was known that the vernal equinox falls around March 21st. At that Council, it was therefore decided that Easter would be the Sunday following the first full moon after March 21st. This resolved the religious aspect of observing Easter.

As you know, we now use the Gregorian calendar. Over the centuries, a miscalculation of the number of days and hours in a solar year developed. This was corrected after Pope Gregory had the correct date for the Easter equinox calculated using a gnomon around 1580.

Gergy doesn't intend to introduce a new set of annual accounts. He simply wants to follow in the footsteps of his Italian predecessors and have the right measuring instruments to do so. A gnomon alone isn't enough. But the moon phases are easy to observe. Moreover, Easter is liturgically fixed in a kind of fictional perpetual lunar calendar that describes the average movements of a fictional moon. Just a quick note regarding what Boudewijn said. Pope Benedict XIV had Galileo's works removed from the Index in 1757. But immediately after his election as Pope 17 years earlier, it became clear to the interested clergy that the view on science would be less dogmatic during this pontificate.

Ultimately, De Gergy commissioned the then young astronomer Le Monnier to establish a meridian in the church of Saint-Sulpice. Every day a spot of sunlight crosses a brass rod embedded in white marble at true solar noon. On the day of the winter solstice, the spot falls on the highest point of the continuous obelisk built on the north end. This obelisk is necessary because otherwise, on the day

of the winter solstice, the spot would be only visible about 65 feet outside the church wall. On the day of the equinoxes, the spot glides across the brass equinox circle not far from the altar. On the day of the summer solstice, the spot illuminates the southern point of the line embedded in a square marble block. Even today, Le Monnier determines the precise location of the spot of sunlight on the noon line in this marble square every year on the day of the summer solstice. Through these years of observations, he has been able to calculate the variation in the Earth's obliquity. According to what he told the Academy of Sciences, that variation would amount to about 45 arc-seconds per century.

I like the history of the construction of the *meridian* of Saint-Sulpice, which is wrongly named *gnomon*. It's a beautiful story. It tells us something about how to work within the boundaries of two worlds of thought. Problems only arise when one world of thought tries to impose itself on the other.

It is bad when science becomes dogmatised, but also when a dogma is presented as science.

Scientific research depends on confirming hypotheses and accepting that hypotheses can be wrong, or that they can be subsumed by others. There is no absolute truth in science. Le Monnier seems to be able to confirm the hypothesis of the variation in the Earth's obliquity with his calculations. That hypothesis, in itself, helps support the hypotheses for other phenomena. And that's it.

A dogma is an expression of a group that is or becomes culturally connected. Presenting a dogma as science results in preaching absolute truth. We've often seen that preaching absolute truth according to cultural standards is a disaster that leads to war.

For me, Saint-Sulpice is a tiny example of the cosmopolitan idea: incorporating a measuring instrument into a place of worship caters to both scientists and priests, who each use the instrument in their own way. The priest wants to know precisely when to call for midday prayer and receive confirmation that Easter is being

celebrated at the right time; the scientist wants to be able to make additional observations for his astronomical research.

Jean-Jacques sighs briefly. “You tell such captivating stories, Grandma. And the moral of Mathilde Larouge’s stories is, in my opinion, more comprehensive than that of Jean de La Fontaine’s fables.”

The entire group bursts into joyful laughter. After saying a hearty goodbye to each other and to the old year, the guests return home, and the housemates retire to their sleeping quarters.

The year 1789 is not even a month old when Johannes informs Jan that Mrs. Marie Van Den Heede has sold her property on Langestraat to an Antwerp wholesaler. Théodore Van Moorsel is one of the two directors of the *Insurance Company of Austrian Flanders*, founded a few years earlier in Oostende by the Scot Herries. Johannes believes this is the right time to negotiate with Van Moorsel about a possible capital injection, but also to discuss goods to be insured, now that it’s clear that the growing unrest in France could spread to the Austrian Netherlands, further complicating financial operations.

Several weeks of lengthy discussions followed, and the Lemaître family saw not only its fishing and fish processing interests, but also its educational activities, financially better supported. As Jan puts it, it was absolutely essential to have its own funds to keep the schoolhouse and its associated research viable, both on Keizerskaai and in Bruges.

But the political climate remains turbulent.

In the Southern Netherlands, unrest is particularly pronounced in Brabant and Hainaut. Local administrators are displeased with the withdrawal, termination, and annulment of privileges in favour of a central government with appointed officials. When, shortly thereafter, the archbishop intervenes and protests against government instruction at the General Seminary, the opposition to

the Emperor's reforms gains momentum. But there is still no unanimous condemnation. The rural population continue to support the reforms. The small townspeople are highly susceptible to influence, so they are sometimes found in the opposition, sometimes among the supporters. Riots erupt everywhere.

In France the *Cahiers de Doléances* (*Books of Grievances*) is collected for the announced Estates-General. The designation and election of representatives for the three Estates within that Estates-General also begins. The Third Estate appears to be breaking through with the concession to send six hundred representatives, the same number as the first two Estates combined.

From her Parisian friends, Mathilde heard that Nicolas de Caritat, Marquis of Condorcet, is increasingly openly advocating for women to play a greater role in political and scientific life. He reportedly pointed out that only a very small elite of aristocratic women has any say, and this is primarily for dynastic reasons. Women, in general, had no political rights, do not vote, and do not hold political office. Mathilde fully agrees that it could no longer be acceptable to continue to allow women to be considered "passive" citizens, dependent on men to determine what was best for them.

The Estates-General will be held in Versailles. Like many other representatives, Maximilien de Robespierre will arrive in Paris in the spring. He represents the Third Estate for his province. In a few months, he will be a member of the National Constituent Assembly and of the *Club of the Jacobins*. He reiterates that he is neither a monarchist nor a republican, and he continues to oppose the death penalty.

On May 5th, the Estates General is officially opened, and everyone takes their seats. To the right of the Speaker are the nobles, church leaders, and monarchists who simply want to maintain the existing regime. To the left of the Speaker are the secular liberals who want to break the power of the traditional order for the benefit of the bourgeoisie.

No one talks about ordinary working people and their participation in the exercise of power. And even if anyone did talk about it, the Estates General wouldn't change anything. Traditionally, voting is by estate, and each estate has one vote. This naturally gives the conservatives of the First and Second Estates a major advantage. The result is almost always 2 to 1. The representatives of the Third Estate demand a roll-call and joint vote. That would give them an advantage. Not only do they hold the same number of seats as the other two Estates, but they also know they can count on support from supporters among the small aristocracy in the First Estate.

Matilde now receives up to two letters a week from her French friends. She follows events almost closely. For example, at the end of June she already knows that the Estates General has declared itself *National Assembly*, after the King rejected the demands of the Estates General. In mid-July, Mathilde knows that an agreement has been reached in the *Assembly* not to break up until the country has a constitution so the meeting now counts as *National Constituent Assembly*. She learns that Jean-Joseph Mounier has drawn up a declaration of the natural and immutable rights of man.

Meanwhile, the Marquis of Condorcet appreciates the protests of many women in the *Books of Grievances* against the state of affairs in France. In doing so, they are effectively making a political statement.

Truly bloody riots erupted at the end of April when rumours circulate that paper wholesaler Jean-Baptiste Réveillon would lower the wages of his 300 workers and propose abolishing the fixed bread price. Réveillon, who also had an interest in balloon production and the special azure-blue wallpaper for balloons, subsequently flees to England, while his house and its contents are largely destroyed by fire.

For the time being, the riots end with the storming of the Bastille prison. Women also participate in this. Market and laundry women, in particular, are increasingly organising to protest their poor

economic situation.

During those months, the previous year's poor grain harvest was deeply felt. Famine raged in many places. Not far from Dijon, for example, General Jean-Pierre du Teil decided to suppress a hunger uprising. He entrusted the task to the young Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte.

In Oostende too, the tension is palpable due to food shortages. When things really start to look bleak, the city council, led by André Van Iseghem, decide to award bonuses to those who bring in grain to Oostende. Meanwhile, the grain toll is abolished. But Mathilde, Jan, and Madeleine don't think there's any reason to leave the city for the time being. The schoolhouse's activities continue as usual. In the small community, schoolteachers, children, and parents show solidarity with each other as best they can.

While the rural population in the Austrian Netherlands continues to express its sympathy for the Emperor's reforms, France experiences a full-blown peasant revolt despite the initial steps toward abolishing feudal rights. For some, the reform isn't happening fast enough; for others, it's going too far.

The Prince-Bishopric of Liège borders both the Austrian Netherlands and France. News of the storming of the Bastille in Paris sparks a local uprising. The authoritarian Prince-Bishop is driven out. In the city of Liège, conflicts had long been brewing between the industrial bourgeoisie, the lower clergy, the nobility, and the autocratic Prince-Bishop. The industrial bourgeoisie soon proved to possess sufficient resources and power to take over the city government. In doing so, they succeeded in forcing the nobility and clergy to relinquish most of their privileges. The rebels in the Prince-Bishopric wanted reforms like those of the Austrian Emperor to abolish the centuries-old privileges of the clergy and nobility. But while in the Austrian Netherlands this was done centrally through appointed officials, in Liège, more direct action by the industrial

bourgeoisie would bring about change. In any case, the uprising in Liège motivated the rebels in Brabant and Hainaut, and more recently in several Flemish cities as well. However, the resistance to central decision-making in the Austrian Netherlands is based on two completely opposing motivations. While the Emperor is the targeted figure, the conservatives want to regain their privileges, while those who, like the bourgeois of Liège, sympathise with the French, want more generalised participation in decision-making.

Towards the end of October, a more threatening atmosphere prevailed in the Austrian Netherlands, partly due to events in Paris. A new mass uprising broke out, partly as a result of a perhaps greatly exaggerated report in several newspapers that the cockade had been desecrated at the royal palace. A huge banquet was being held there, just as famine was ravaging France. The protest march to the royal palace was primarily made up of working-class women. This news quickly spread, not only in France but also abroad. One of these women was Pauline Léon. She demanded universal political rights for women and would later also defend the right for women to bear arms during the short existence of the *Society of Revolutionary Republican Citizens*. In this she follows others including Nicolas de Caritat who published his articles in the *Journal of the Society* throughout this year 1789 continues to defend the political rights of women.

The persistent threat of a grain shortage, the ongoing unrest in Paris, and the uprising in Liège against the authoritarian Prince-Bishop ultimately fuelled rebellious spirits in Oostende as well. At the end of that same month in October, some on Keizerskaai feared that the situation would flare up when news arrived the Austrian troops had suffered a bloody defeat at Turnhout. Increasingly, people were hearing about two leaders against the Austrian Emperor, Hendrik Van der Noot and Frans Vonck. Therefore, Jan and Madeleine were pleased to see that, despite everything, many

residents of Oostende remain calm, suggesting that their fears are perhaps unfounded. Only the Austrian general, Count De Rindsmaul, stationed there, is particularly concerned. He has the mayor convening a meeting of the board of aldermen and declares his intention to arm the corporations to defend the city. However, the corporation deans, led by Mayor Van Iseghem, feel this is not necessary. When the general nevertheless begins placing cannons on the fortifications, the mayor and aldermen propose to avoid bloodshed by simply opening the city gates if necessary. The count then realises that he would be better off accepting this decision and leaves the city with the entire garrison.

In France, the confrontation between the various classes continues. The atmosphere is now more bitter. People are openly talking about revolution, and more and more voices are being raised to simply set aside the old aristocracy. Some even want to set aside the entire aristocracy, including that part that initially spread republican ideas. The government should no longer remain in the hands of the nobility. The Church, in particular, is being severely criticised. In November, all church property is confiscated. Priests will henceforth be paid by the state. Church tithes had already been abolished. Church-organised poor relief and schools are shutting down.

This kind of news leads conservatives in the Austrian Netherlands to quickly dismiss any revolutionary wind from France as the devil's evil work, while continuing to thwart any Imperial attempt at reform. Compared to their southern neighbours, the Emperor's reforms are less far-reaching, but they could quickly give leverage to those sympathising with the French revolutionaries. In Brabant, an alliance against the Emperor still exists, with whom they disagree on just about everything, except the desire to see the Emperor depart.

Now Mathilde fears she was right when she saw the beginnings of

an internal war between different classes, but also between people of the same class. Poorly informed followers of opposing leaders, with contradictory, often dogmatic, information, are pitted against each other. And this could quickly lead to the bloodbath the aldermen want to avoid. Mathilde advises her sons in Oostende and Lille to prepare to find shelter elsewhere with their families, and proposes involving all the friends of Keizerskaai and the Bruges schoolhouse. Here in the coastal region, Sluis seems likely to be the refuge once again.

Four difficult years are ahead for the Lemaître family. The three teaching couples don't want their project on Keizerskaai to fall into disrepair, but they will rarely be together in Oostende during this period.

It begins as early as January 11, 1790, when the *Confederation of the United States of the Netherlands* declares itself independent from the Austrian crown. The leaders, led by Hendrik Van der Noot, speak of freedom gained. It seems that Emperor Joseph II is excluded. In the wake of Brabant, all the regions of the Southern Netherlands, except the Duchy of Luxembourg, have declared their independence. The confederation organises itself into a States-General and announces the *Tractaet van Vereeninge*. The text is inspired by the American Declaration of Independence and the organisation of the Northern United Provinces. But everything suggests that there are many obstacles. Ultimately, the Confederation will be very short-lived... The conservatives want a quick return to the power structure as it existed before the changes introduced by Emperor Joseph II. Those adhering to Rousseau's ideas, on the other hand, want to follow the path of the French. Such vast differences prove insurmountable. The proposal by the States of Hainaut to prepare new institutions to represent "the Nation" immediately causes concern and aggression towards the reformers. On January 30, the conservative majority of the States of Brabant appoints the Prussian General Schönfeldt, who

is residing in the confederation, as commander-in-chief of the army. A day later, Cardinal Franckenberg makes himself heard with a Lenten letter. In it, he explicitly condemns the supporters of new ideas such as the separation of church and state.

Cleverly manipulated by the old established powers, first the urban middle classes and then the rural population turned against Vonck's followers. It was, after all, Vonck who had wanted to give them a place in government. The conflict grew when the group inspired by Rousseau, after the nobility, the clergy, and the peasants, now also found themselves facing the Brussels guilds. At mass meetings, armed guild members and peasants protested against new ideas against tolerance and against Vonck's followers. Newspaper owners further fanned the flames of anti-religious philosophy.

Thanks to the schoolhouse, the Lemaître family enjoys a good reputation among the various communities of Oostende, but Jan is still worried. He knows all too well how people incited by hate preachers from the conservative church can resort to acts of violence without hesitation. Boudewijn and Gertrude are critical of certain attitudes of less-educated pastors, but they are well-versed in Ostend's Catholic community. Karel and Tiene tend to keep a low profile. Anyone could easily argue that, having worked with Jan and Madeleine for so long, they are somewhat suspect when it comes to church matters. Jan proposes that Boudewijn and Gertrude move into Keizerskaai and, if possible, keep part of the schoolhouse open while they themselves leave Oostende for the time being. Officially, they are taking a break to do research and write. Karel and Tiene are staying as long as they can and will leave the city when more people do so.

Everyone is convinced it will be a short absence, but the farewell is still quite emotional. Just before Carnival, Jan, Madeleine, and Mathilde leave for Sluis, taking with them their most important study materials.

The trio moves in with their friends, the schoolmaster family.

There, they hear from the first mate who had previously brought back testimonies concerning the slave trade, histories from abroad about Andrew Bell's work in Madras, in the East Indies. Andrew has lived there since 1787 and is currently chaplain to several British regiments there. Since being appointed chief inspector of an orphanage for the illegitimate and orphaned sons of officers last year, he has frequently given lectures. He claims, among other things, to have seen Malabar children teach others the alphabet by drawing in the sand. Therefore, he decided to do something similar at the orphanage: bright children take charge of those who are less bright. He clearly opposes corporal punishment and apparently developed a system of rewards.

In France, there is someone stirring up the rural population against the proposal to secularise the social functions of the State. The agitation began when the *Constituent Assembly* decided that priests must swear a constitutional oath of loyalty to remain recognised and paid. Contemplative monastic orders must disappear, and bishops who do not take the oath will be deposed and replaced by constitutional colleagues. The protests are causing bitter divisions among the population, mainly in rural areas and the west of the country. They contribute to the unpopularity of the ongoing reforms, which are increasingly being called *Revolution*.

Mathilde hears from her family who remained in Lille Emilie de Châtelet's son maintain his title of Duke of Châtelet. He did not follow in his mother's footsteps. He showed little interest in pure scientific research, despite his mother's efforts, which included *Institutions de physique* dedicated to him. He chose a military career. Until July 15 of last year, he was a colonel of the Gardes Françaises, the elite corps in the king's service. During his rather short term, he quickly became unpopular among his soldiers, who often came from the common people. They sympathised with the representatives of the Third Estate, while their colonel clearly represented the nobility

in the Estates-General. There, he remained loyal to the king and maintained, among other things, that only the king had the right to declare war and peace. No, thinks Mathilde, that's really his father's son, not his mother's son...

In the newly established *Confederation of United States of the Netherlands* it is now abundantly clear that the Conservative Statists have no interest whatsoever in popularly elected representatives in government. Finally, the better-informed farmers and textile workers understand that Emperor Joseph II's reforms are closer to the demands of the Third Estate. These reforms are also somewhat more responsive to the common people than the Statists' proposals. They demonstrate their support for the Emperor by pinning on black cockades.

But Joseph II died of tuberculosis at the end of February. His younger brother, Leopold II succeeds him and can't understand why his brother's reforms, identical to those that had succeeded in Tuscany, were met with so much resistance in the Netherlands. Even after he agrees to drop several restrictive measures against the church, the States-General refuses to give up: Austrian authority had to go. Period.

The family staying in Sluis is often quicker to be informed about what is happening in the *Confederation of United States of the Netherlands* than who remained in Oostende. Mathilde learns that the population in the States of Limburg and Overmaas has many doubts. Many volunteer corps are unwilling to simply take the oath of allegiance to the States of Brabant, which they consider too conservative. As a result, troublemakers in the service of the conservative aristocracy and clergy incite the ignorant population of Brussels and the surrounding area. The homes of sympathisers of the more liberal French Revolution are systematically looted and destroyed. In addition, a hate campaign is waged against the followers of Jan Frans Vonck. He and his counterpart Verlooy do

not steer the uprising against Austrian rule towards a return to the privileges of the aristocracy and the church, as Hendrik van der Noot wishes. Both defend the Montesquieu model with the separation of powers and greater participation by the rest of the population. Although the Statists succeeded in forcing many followers of Jan Vonck and Jan Baptist Verlooy to flee to France, pockets of resistance remain in Limburg, Ghent, and Hainaut.

Jan and Madeleine agree with Mathilde that the *Confederation of the United States of the Netherlands* won't last long. It's now certain that there's no revolution at all. There's simply a kind of political counter-reformation underway, with those using the power they still possess to regain all the old privileges. The First and Second Estates briefly and skilfully exploited the defenders of the Third Estate to strengthen their position against the Austrian Emperor. Now that the Statists believe they've regained power, they want to get rid of this unwanted ally as quickly as possible.

"Some genius even came up with the idea of issuing coins featuring the same lion that commemorated the uprising against Spain two hundred years ago," Jan says somewhat ironically to his hosts. "Those old gentlemen, who always thought in terms of power and the obedience of ignorant servants, clearly demonstrate with this that they are indeed living in the past."

"Furthermore, I don't quite understand the information that suddenly many people walking around with orange cockades. What does that mean?" asks Mathilde. "Is this yet another example of how one can manipulate almost everyone as long as one withholds knowledge and information from them? I find it hard to imagine that a large portion of ordinary people suddenly feel connected to the House of Orange, and that those who dream of a Catholic Republic take the Protestant *Republic of the Seven Netherlands* as an example, let alone as an ally."

Their host laughs. "Perhaps we could design a generality cockade.

We'd give two to every resident of Staats-Vlaanderen, and ask them to give one to the Flemish immigrants. We could demand a kind of cross-border generality where our States General and the States General of Van der Noot and Van Eupen could argue about who would govern it."

"Forgive my ignorance," says Madeleine, "but who is Van Eupen?"  
"I read about him in the newspaper a few days ago. Canon Petrus Van Eupen is Bishop Nelis of Antwerp's go-to man. He's an ultramontane and opposed Joseph II's reforms from the very beginning. He worked his way up to become Hendrik Van der Noot's most important advisor. But I wanted to know, Mathilde, what you can tell us about what you learned from Lille."

"My son, who stayed behind in Lille," Mathilde begins, "wrote to me that Jan Vonck and Jan Verlooy have been living there since Van der Noot and his followers stirred up intolerance. They've apparently agreed to write or republish and distribute some texts together. I think they want to make the connection between the Emperor's previous despotism, which they opposed until last year, and what they consider the current despotism of those who control the States-General of the Netherlands today. I remind you of Verlooy's words. In *The intrigues of despotism unmasked* he says: '*But Despotism! Despotism, which reigns only through fear, which according to its monstrous nature must always either strike or hold its arm up, sought victims to inspire terror.*' Furthermore, it can be said he calls on everyone to oppose any form of government where power is in the hands of one person.

When they fled the threats of a poorly informed population incited by conservatives and settled in Lille, Verlooy wrote that the Statists had already unlawfully seized power and sovereignty in December 1789. They drove out Joseph II, but did exactly the same: they behaved despotically. This is the thesis Verlooy maintains, both in his *Reasoned project* as in the pamphlet *De Nederlandsche volksgezinde [The Dutch popular]* when he says: '*But States without*

*Sovereignty, or Sovereignty without States, are the same. These are always tyrants, despots.*' In *H. Van der Noot unmasked* Verlooy writes that '*States without a Prince are no less tyrants than a Prince without states*'. He adds how to organize elections, something the conservatives do not want.

In his *Letter from the Fugitive Dutchmen* which he signs, just like Reasoned project with *The Dutch popular* and distributes from Lille, he talks about the accusations against groups of people accused of riots: '*But what seditiousness is found in the popular elections that have already taken place in Ghent, Tournai, Oostende, Meenen, Mechelen, ...? Are not those Van der Noot idolatries and peasant processions to the capital cities ten times more seditious than an election within each parish?*' You sense Verlooy's drive when you read his writing. And it's easy to see that Jan Vonck is even more radical than his colleague."

"But how does Verlooy see the organisation of administrative affairs?" Mathilde's host asks further.

He speaks, like the Americans and the French, about the need for a constitution. And it must be strong. He already spoke about this in 1787 when he said: '*A Constitution born at random, a Constitution found or composed carelessly, would not promise longevity. The work of your vigour will be dearer to you and will be more solid!*' According to him, good politics is not possible without a good structure."

A restless *Confederation of the United States of the Netherlands* is not the wish of the leading royal houses. They primarily want the Southern Netherlands as a buffer against the spread of French republican ideology, where there is currently little or no room for a royal house. At the end of July, the Reichenbach Convention ends the open rivalry with Austria. Thus, Prussian support for the Confederation ends. And now, two months later, in The Hague, representatives of the emperor, Prussia, Great Britain, and the United Provinces sign a convention laying down the conditions for

the restoration of imperial authority, repealing all previous imperial reforms in the ecclesiastical, administrative, and judicial spheres. This is the death blow for the Independent States as Hendrik Van der Noot's Statists see it. After all, they can hardly continue to fight solely for the purpose of retaining power against the Austrian Emperor when the royal houses, including the Austrian, guarantee the restoration of all privileges.

Since the beginning of the Confederation's adventure, Jean-Jacques, Elise, and little Louis have remained in Bruges without any major worries. The tensions between supporters of Vonck and Verlooy and those of Hendrik Van der Noot are hardly noticeable here. Generally, there is a certain initial sympathy for the rebels, who tend not to change the status quo. Only staunch supporters of the imperial party occasionally suffered severe hardship, during those months when it was thought the Austrians had left Flanders for good.

Jean-Jacques also sees this at annual fairs and other trading venues. He moves quite easily among guild members from various crafts and trades and knows the best known auctioneers who lead auctions and public sales. From the former auctioneer Greysel, he knows that Bruges had gotten along very well with the administration of Empress Maria Theresa and that her recently deceased son had also been warmly welcomed on his first visit to Bruges shortly after his accession to the throne ten years ago. But in Bruges happened what Maria Theresa had feared, knowing her impatient son. He took a radical approach to his reforms and the privileged population of the lower nobility, clergy, guilds, and deans immediately rebelled against this despotic drive to modernise and do away with long-established rules, local laws, and forms of government. It wasn't long before they joined the Brabant Revolution. More liberal Vonck supporters initially participated, but Bruges quickly follows the line of Van der Noot's Statists.

Both old Greysel and young Greysel get along well with Jean-Jacques, and often tease him about the choice of his son's name... Louis... are Jean-Jacques and Elise thinking of a Louis XVII yet? they often joke. They also joke about how you can find a Jean-Jacques and a Louis in the same family. Jean-Jacques reiterates that they were rather seduced by the etymological meaning *free warrior*. And, he adds with some hesitation, perhaps also by the German declension Ludwig. That is the name of the child prodigy Beethoven, not of a monarch with absolutist tendencies.

Jean-Jacques praises the friendship of the traditionally Catholic Greysel family, and the Greysels greatly admire how Jean-Jacques manages to encourage young people to reflect and speak, sometimes across the difficult boundaries of class, trade, or craft, in a complementary tone rather than an attacking one. This friendship is crucial for the recognition of their work, even by those who have reservations about a schoolhouse outside the control of the church, where a woman is closely involved, and for both boys and girls. Jean-Jacques's joy is naturally immense when young Greysel announces that a little Hanne was born on September 7th and that Jean-Jacques and Elise can count on a Greysel student a few years from now.

Bruges is only a four-hour walk from Sluis, so the family hadn't seen fit to move the Bruges branch to Sluis any earlier than as precaution could be necessary. The summer months may have been somewhat more oppressive for Bruges' imperial supporters, but Jean-Jacques and his family can rest assured in that respect as well. Their stance on education is well-known, as is the schoolhouse. But there's a tradition among the Lemaître family not to adopt presumptuous attitudes. The church's influence on municipal education isn't simply condemned publicly. The educational family points to possible abuses of power by imperial supporters, conservative Statists, and liberal supporters of Vonck and Verlooy. Their goal is to help people think. Only some petty, hateful priest

could verbally threaten them from the pulpit, but, as the Greysels say, they are protected by their own integrity, even in these troubled times...

Mathilde has since realised that things are generally quieter in the Southern Netherlands than in France. She now understands how the principle of freedom can be abused by liberals who are gradually viewing any professional association as an insult to the right to free enterprise. She talks to Jan about it. Is anything allowed, and can everyone just do what one wants to do? Can one organize a community without fixed structures? When? What does that entail in terms of education, training, knowledge, and science?

Gradually, it becomes clear to the family members staying in Sluis that they may have reacted a little too hastily to what everyone described as a threatening situation. Karel and Tiene report that while Mayor André Van Iseghem frequently visits the States of Flanders, all things considered, the situation in Oostende is calm. The board of aldermen keeps the city under control despite the initial division between those who wanted the Emperor gone and a return to the past, those who wanted a new policy without Austria, and those who wanted the Emperor to come back. Perhaps the death of Joseph II, his brother's promises, and the poorly organised patriot army play a role in all this. It all seems to go rather unnoticed by Ostend residents.

In more veiled terms, Karel writes Van der Noot's followers are inciting illiterate workers and farmers to loot the homes of those known to be Vonck supporters. One can see once again how the Lord is allowing himself to be abused on this tiny piece of the planet where those in power are using the slogan *Domini Est Regnum* spreading the Kingdom of the Lord. Those followers are very discreet in Oostende, if they even exist, Karel jokes, because there's no sign of terrorist acts against the school building, for example. Nor is there anything else, for that matter. They've planted a tree of

liberty, but that liberty is apparently interpreted in different ways. Karel further writes that most of the States have now been reoccupied by Austrian troops and that Flanders is under the control of the new Emperor Leopold II, who is apparently fulfilling the agreements of the Hague Convention, without too much violence. He urges Jan and Madeleine to return before December 11th. Mayor Van Iseghem has made arrangements with General Count De Baillet-Latour for the lodging of officers during the occupation of the city to reassert Austrian authority. If they return in time, the Keizerskaai will only be partially requisitioned, and the classrooms and library will remain fully available for the schoolhouse, which had only been open for six months last year.

So Jan and Madeleine are back in time to witness the end of the strange upheaval that wasn't. It's time to celebrate again with carillon and evening lights. You sometimes wonder, Mathilde observes, if many people aren't actually indifferent to the city and state government as long as there are regular festivities.

What Mathilde likes less is that the Elector of Bavaria is persuaded by the Catholic Church to issue an edict to ban the organisation of the *Illuminati*. The Church and the Elector to banish anything that smacks as Freemasonry or a secret circle. Of course, many societies have a clear reason for keeping the identities of their members secret. Many simply want to protect themselves from the excessive power and arrogance of ecclesiastical and secular authorities and have no plans to abolish the existing power structure. Even many years after the ban of the *Illuminati* conservative and religious critics still often slander those suspected of having been members of the group. They claim, among other things, the *Perfectibles* to be underground responsible for the French Revolution, something that Mathilde, like many others, dismisses as not very credible.

Meanwhile, in full light, the Marquis de Condorcet continues his advocacy for women's rights and publishes *De l'admission des femmes au droit de cité* of which Mathilde receives a copy via Lille.

A few weeks after returning to Ostend, Jan contacts the literary society again. Just before attending the first meeting of the new year, he receives the society's second update of regulations, which had been approved shortly before Christmas.

The years 1791 and 1792 would ultimately be politically turbulent. In Oostende there wasn't often much violence, but the regular quartering of foreign soldiers, sometimes from France, sometimes from Austria, make the teaching work of the schoolhouse couples considerably more difficult. Going out with the children is often impossible.

In the interior of Flanders, but especially in Brabant, Hainaut and now also the Prince-Bishopric of Liège, things are much more intense.

When the governors return to Brussels in June, they are struck by the recalcitrance of the local minor rulers, sometimes supported by the rest of the population, sometimes not. This is due to fluctuations in food, climate, and local taxes. The House of Habsburg is well aware that in these regions, the princes' right to govern and treat the local nobility, the clergy, and the powerful deans of the guilds as ordinary subjects has always been disputed. The Third Estate, as does the minor nobility, remains focused on France. The clergy, however, holds on to Hendrik van der Noot's Statists. Troublemakers occasionally drift over from Paris, and the security forces often dare not intervene. It is known that Governor Maria Christina complained about all the recalcitrance. Many still hope for a revolution now that the States seem to open to the defenders of the Third Estate and possibly even to popular elections.

From Lille comes the news that followers of Vonck and Verlooy, together with anticlerical Liège refugees, are setting up clubs and groups protected by the French *Constituent Assembly*. The members of those clubs are convinced that *Belgium Austriacum* soon will be the *États-Belges-Unis* and that Liège will be part of it.

These groups are all very clear. They want to curtail the church's power in secular affairs and are therefore certainly not allies of Van der Noot and Van Eupen. They primarily defend the right to freedom of the individual, rather than economic or even social equality.

Verlooy for example is enthusiastic about the abolition of feudal rights and the division of estates that prevent everyone from developing themselves in complete freedom. Jan's brother's circle of friends and Madeleine's family has many reservations about the Le Chapelier law, which has banned all professional groups since June. But Verlooy is clear. According to him, France is now the country of '*true freedom, even those of a true equality in rights,...*' At the very least, you can say that Verlooy doesn't deceive anyone with false promises. He knows that goods or fortunes will not be distributed equally. He writes: '*You are also led to believe that complete equality also entails equality of fortunes and distribution of goods and property. No, this is fallacy.*' According to Jan and Madeleine, what Verlooy says roughly corresponds to what Emmanuel Sieyès writes: '*Inequalities in property and industry are like inequalities in age, sex, size, color, etc*' Jan summarises that while the idea of political and legal equality is coming over from France, it's not universal equality. Those liberal thinkers who don't believe a school for everyone is necessary, don't consider pursuing universal equality logical, let alone achievable.

The reforming princes has no intention of representing the people through elections, much less a republic without a monarch. Karel is convinced of this since August of this year. At the end of September, he recounts an encounter held last month at Pillnitz Castle between Emperor Leopold II and Frederick William II of Prussia. According to his sources, the failed attempt by Louis XVI of France to escape from Paris was the impetus for this. The princely houses, with which both monarchs have family ties, encouraged them to resolve

their differences and consider Louis' fate. Madeleine and Mathilde try to find out more. The meeting in Pillnitz served primarily to resolve disputes and armed conflicts between the princes. There was also some attention paid to the situation in France, more as a gesture towards Louis' brother, who, like other members of the French nobility, preferred to remain in safer places for the time being. Both women quickly obtain the presumably correct text of the Pillnitz Declaration via Lille. It reads as follows: "*His Majesty the Emperor and His Majesty the King of Prussia, having heard the wishes and representations of Monsieur and Monseigneur the Count of Artois, jointly declare that they regard the situation in which the King of France finds himself today as an object of interest common to all sovereigns of Europe. They hope that this interest will not be ignored by the powers whose help is requested, and that consequently they will not refuse to employ, jointly with their said Majesties, the most effective means relative to their forces to put the King of France in a position to strengthen, in the most perfect liberty, the bases of a monarchical government, equally suitable to the rights of sovereigns and to the well-being of the French nation. Then, and in this case, their said Majesties, the Emperor and the King of Prussia are resolved to act promptly and in mutual agreement with the forces necessary to obtain the goal proposed in common. In the meantime, they will give their troops the appropriate orders so they are within reach of becoming active..*"

The content of this statement somewhat ridicules the pronouncements of Anne Josephe Théroigne de Méricourt, despite the Amazonian attitude she adopts in Brussels, which also provokes the ire of many Statists. She boasts of having spoken with the emperor and converted him to the principles she defends.

But in France, the declaration is received with great anger. For those who favour the republic, rumours circulate in Lille, this announcement is a full-blown declaration of war by the monarchs of Europe, egged on by the exiled French royalists. Shortly afterward, anti-royalist and anti-clerical attitudes become even

more intertwined in France, and the *Constituent Assembly* determines that all non-constitutional priests are automatically suspect.

At the Keizerskaai people fear that war is now really on the way.

## Deadly arrogance and ignorance

The Keizerskaai is in mourning. On the first day of 1792, Mathilde passed away. Jan and Madeleine are deeply devastated. Jean-Jacques, Elise, and the almost four-year-old Lodewijk have come to Oostende to support Jean-Jacques' parents. Boudewijn and Gertrude also feel they have lost a wise grandmother.

Jan promises to work on the text he was finalising with his mother, so it can be published before the end of the year. The essay is a tribute to grandparents John and Mariana and updates their framework, which they used to map arrogance and ignorance.

The schoolhouse's activities are resuming their normal course now that the Austrian regiment of soldiers has left the city. Jan urges Jean-Jacques to exercise caution in publicly expressing his views, especially when it comes to the political participation of ordinary people. These kinds of ideas clearly originate primarily from the *Jacobin Club* and rely on the works of Rousseau, which deal with the sovereignty of the people. The right to participate seems today to be a contradiction in terms in the administrative area where its own States General refers to as the *Kingdom of the Lord*. The leaders here still want to rule by the grace of God rather than by the grace of the people. The separation of powers hardly places legislative power in the hands of the entire people. Even the liberals are very confused when discussing electoral systems. Although the groups from Lille are still willing to contribute to expel the Austrians, it's better not to shout from the rooftops too quickly they are advocating the universal sovereignty of the people. Jan believes it would be more useful to deal calmly and decisively with children and young people, teaching them to work together and to jointly devise rules for that work.

Pillnitz's declaration effectively creates a peculiar political turn in

France. The *Constituent Assembly* sees the declaration as an attack on the ongoing reforms and agrees with Louis XVI's proposal to declare war against whom co-signed Pillnitz. Jan wonders whether revolutionary zeal causes blindness. According to him, the French king's aim, after the death of Leopold II and the coronation of Francis II as Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, was to quickly rally all conservative forces scattered at home and abroad with the aim of defending the Crown. But no, many members of the Legislative Assembly consider the French declaration of war necessary to further spread the revolution. In the *Jacobin Club*, fellow member Robespierre declares that he cannot agree with this argument because no one likes to deal with armed missionaries. He confirms he is neither a royalist nor a revolutionary. He confirms once more he opposes to death penalty.

The first raids of the French armies, supported by legions from Liège and the rebellious Southern Netherlands, meet only with defeat and continue to sow death and destruction.

The Lemaître family learns with sadness how a kind of small civil war raged in Lille. General Dillon was assassinated on suspicion of aristocratic conspiracy. Later that year the remaining family dies during the siege of Lille. The city holds out and does not surrender, but everything that still was connected to the family suddenly disappears. The family never hears from Jan and Madeleine's brothers again. Houses and libraries apparently went up in flames. These are dark days once again. The only cynical consolation is that Mathilde did not have to live to see this disaster. An Austrian garrison reappears in Oostende remaining there until shortly after the siege of Lille ends. Then the Austrians leave the city in a hurry, and French troops capture it. Many Ostend residents, since long unaware who stands for what, flee to Zeeland once more between November 12 and 17. Jan and Madeleine risk staying in Oostende. Karel, Tiene, Boudewijn, and Gertrude take written documents and proofs from Jan and Madeleine with them,

intending to have them published in Utrecht or Amsterdam. The schoolhouse closes again for a while.

In the period between the renewed occupation of the city by Austrian troops and the planting of another French tree of liberty in the main square, violence in France turned to terror. This much was already clear to the family after the disaster in Lille.

The persecution of non-constitutional priests continues. According to the *Constituent Assembly* twenty complaints are enough to declare a priest outlaw. The king refuses to sign the law, but during the summer months that bill causes several murders and lynchings of priests suspected or known to not support or defend with their lives the revolutionary interpretation of *Freedom in Equality*.

The residents of Keizerskaai listen with growing dismay to the testimonies of civilians who have fled from France and are seeking shelter wherever they can. Four family acquaintances from Lille are staying with Jan and Madeleine. They tell real stories of terror. In August, the *Constituent Assembly* deposed the king deposed, and in September, the abolition of the monarchy is proclaimed. Many royalists are murdered without trial, either on the streets or in prisons. Meanwhile, the farmers believe that the rules established in 1789, which allowed for the redemption of rights, do not go far enough. A new regulation is introduced, but unrest remains in the countryside, often due to inadequate or incorrect information.

The utterly irresponsible attitude of arrogant, ignorant people regarding Madame du Coudray's midwifery training is a severe blow to the women. Madeleine sees not only the ignorance, but also, and above all, the blind arrogance of what she calls a conflict-seeking male-dominated world.

"You're more than angry," Karel states, not long before he and Tiene travel towards Sluis.

"It's a real scandal," says Madeleine. "You have to understand that Madame du Coudray must be about 77 years old now and lives with

a cousin. As a result of the movement against the monarchy, she has lost her royal pension. The entire decision-making process in the *Constituent Assembly* which apparently nowadays has the name of *National Convention* remains a male-dominated field. And they pay absolutely no attention to the training of midwives outside the major cities. It's simply no important to men."

"I really wonder if this indifference to the painful and often fatal births is due to male stupidity, religious arrogance, or general ignorance," Jan believes. "Besides, it's a strange form of revolutionary compassion when men refuse to do everything they can to help protect the women with whom they have children."

"The women and the children," Madeleine continues. "I heard that Madame du Coudray's niece sent a letter to the Legislative Assembly emphasising the importance of trained midwives. She gives the example of La Fayette, whose almost miraculous birth was thanks to Madame du Coudray. But the political games and underhanded beatings among power-hungry men caused La Fayette to fall into disgrace. His opponent, Dr. Alphonse Leroy, took advantage of this to criticise the ignorance of all midwives. I heard that he spoke disparagingly of the *Demoiselle* who teaches births with a doll."

"To place him," Jan adds, "he's known in Paris as an arrogant opinion-maker who, even as a doctor, is guided more by his own sympathies and antipathies than by scientific work. He doesn't hesitate to present other people's inventions or techniques as his own when it suits him."

"At this moment, Doctor Vicq d'Azyr has completed a fairly large national study. This shows that outside of Paris, many doctors are behind Madame Leroy," says Madeleine. "The misogyny of Leroy, who is after all specialised in childbirth, does much more harm than Madame's course which is based solely on practical experience. Far from the hospital and the specialist physician, the course, using a doll, gives midwives insight into childbirth that they

would otherwise not have been able to acquire so easily. By ridiculing this, the arrogant Leroy himself opens the door to all obscurantist amateurs. Men and women today are exploiting the revolutionary thoughtlessness of abolishing titles, which also devalues courses and studies. This mistake by the revolutionaries weighs heavily on a population already kept ignorant by the church.”

With the abolition of the monarchy, France adopted a republican calendar. Christian holidays are converted into lay holidays. Many churches are given a new purpose, renaming them with the designation of Temple of Reason. Madeleine and Jan strongly doubt whether such a change makes any sense. Will reason henceforth be dogma? The civil liturgy *Cult of Reason* seems like a kind of childish expression of it, Jan thinks. Do the members of the *Jacobin clubs* really mean this? Nothing is very clear. Why not develop reason in the universities, now that they are also trying to rid those institutions of their ecclesiastical influence? But later they hear from French exiles that within the *Jacobin club* a group is gradually formed around Maximilien de Robespierre. There is talk of dictatorial tendencies when he, who always spoke out against the death penalty, now dismisses prison and street murders with ‘*Citizens, did you want a revolution without revolution?*’. Some time later Jan receives a number from the *Chronique de Paris* in hands. In it Condorcet writes: ‘*One sometimes wonders why so many women follow Robespierre, at his home, in the Jacobin tribune, at the Cordeliers, at the Convention? It's because the French Revolution is a religion which Robespierre has turned into a cult: he is a priest with devoted disciples, but it's clear that he only appears from time to time... sa puissance est en quenouille... he's all too happy to be represented. He calls himself the friend of the poor and the weak; his followers are women and the feeble-minded. He earnestly receives their adoration and their homage. At the slightest danger, he disappears, only to reappear*

*when the danger has passed. Robespierre is a priest and will never be more than that.'*

Reading occasionally the *Chronique* or from other newspapers and magazines that refugees bring with them, Jan and Madeleine now have a clearer picture of how a growing number of different groups want something different than the monarchy. Yet these groups spend more time attacking each other than exploring how they complement each other. Thomas More would probably send them to Utopia...

Two days after the schoolhouse friends fled to Sluis, Colonel Maschalk and his troops enter Oostende. The French had barely arrived in the city when they put an end to the existing postal service. They claim it is a private German service. They announced the establishment of a state service that would henceforth serve the entire population. The *Post Counter* opens in the Lange Straat and will be managed by postmaster De Rudder in the coming years.

On November 17th, Jan and Madeleine hear that yet another liberty tree was planted in the market square. Just like Mayor Van Iseghem they don't quite understand why the tree is adorned with a Phrygian cap. While this cap has traditionally been a symbol of acquired freedom, it's now primarily used by the Jacobins. And one might rightly wonder how the Jacobins' proposals lead to more general freedom. One could, of course, argue that generous goals of improving working conditions, raising wages, and abolishing corvées might promote the freedom of individuals. But the general reduction in taxes likely benefits the property-owning, not the propertyless... And what about these proposals:

- Christianity must be banned and church property confiscated (especially land, to be sold to wealthy farmers). Instead of the divine, the human will be worshipped.
- The king and all others who oppose the Republic must be executed.

- The education and training of everyone must be directed towards revolution.
- The months of the year will henceforth have to bear revolutionary names.

Languages other than French are prohibited.

As Jan and Madeleine know from the family annals, universal freedom doesn't come about by simply banning what came before and replacing it with something else with the same exclusivity. They'll think back to that tree of liberty with its Phrygian cap when they hear a year and a half later that on 8 Pluviose III, the Jacobine Jacobin Vieuzac advocated for French as the only language permitted in the French territory with '*Citizens, the language of a free people must be one and the same for all.*' The underlying intention isn't quite the same as advocating a common language in science and education to facilitate knowledge transfer, Jan thinks. Will all free and equal people live only within the borders of French territory? Or will the entire planet become French territory? An interesting empire project...

Without being particularly surprised by the events, Jan and Madeleine feel a certain disappointment when they realise that just as Mathilde had predicted the upheaval underway in France means little more than the taking of power from those who despise the common man by those who despise the common man.

This year Jan publishes '*Nieuwe beschrijving van de denkende mensen en hoe de gedachte gestuurd wordt. Een poging om arrogantie en ignorantie te begrijpen* [A new description of thinking people and how their thoughts are controlled. An attempt to understand arrogance and ignorance.]

It's an adaptation of his grandparents John and Marianne's work on personalities. His perspective on the relationship between arrogance and ignorance is naturally influenced by the political developments in Europe.

What Mathilde and Jan agree on when they revisit Jan's grandparents' reflections is that people with simultaneous extreme low ignorance and arrogance are very rare in Europe. Influenced by his conversations with Mathilde, Madeleine, Karel, and Boudewijn, but also by reading the philosophers in his grandfather's library, Jan is unconvinced by the myths of the noble savage fueled by the stories told by the first Spanish and Portuguese travellers to the West Indies. According to Jan, for those West Indian natives, *ignorance* regarding the concept of possession is not the main plus but it is the *science* that nature is not to be possessed but only to be used. In the entire Christian world, and by extension in all dogmatic societies that accept the belief in the existence of a ruler, the gate is wide open for the establishment of hierarchies. There can be no rulers without existence of the ruled. The master exists only when there is also a servant. And although the philosopher who wrote the *social contract* never used the term the noble savage, he does argue that man is naturally good and becomes corrupted by society. Jan is supported in this by his mother. In reworking his grandparents' text, he starts from the position that general ignorance can only diminish when everyone is included in a culture in which all science *per se* is made accessible to everyone. This doesn't mean that any individual can grasp all of science. Collectively, people today know so much that a single person would go mad if trying to absorb all of it. But libraries are humanly invented extensions of their own minds and memories. And those libraries would be freely available to everyone if everyone could read, understand different languages, and have the time to devote themselves to enriching their minds without limit. A cosmopolitan humanist can only exist in a world where cultural heritage is *by definition* public heritage is; in a world where no one serves the other, but where everyone complements the other. This, in turn, is only possible if dogmas and nations do not draw boundaries between people. Human inventions have nothing to do with maintaining a hunting ground, as we see

with animals and remote tribes, but with distinct cultural ideas. They give rulers the idea that by increasing their possessions, they are eliminating boundaries. Dogmas do not merge into one another in this respect. The most successful, naturally that of the ruler, simply wins over all others. This always makes the adherents of defeated dogmas potentially aggressive.

In the essay, Jan and Madeleine admit to being rather pessimistic about the possibility of building a peaceful and understanding human world. According to their view, even humanists exhibit prevailing traits toward their fellow human beings with a slightly higher degree of arrogance and a slight increase in ignorance. Furthermore, one could speak of neutral figures, who don't use their low ignorance to control their own arrogance but instead try to project an image of having the best interests of others at heart. Among these neutral figures, only the mussel can be said to use its knowledge perhaps to avoid harming others, but also does nothing to benefit them.

In the essay, a table makes the overview of the characters clearer:

OBJ:

New description of thinking people and how thought is controlled							
High arrogance and ignorance						Neutral	
Tolerant Europe	Europeanist (paternalist)	Intolerant Europeanist			Destroyer		enlightened despot
slave	cannon fodder	servant	tamed fool				Diplomat
High ignorance low arrogance						tolerant leader	
despotic king	warlord	slave driver					mussel
High arrogance, low ignorance							
cosmopolitan humanist	convinced humanist	humanist paternalist	tolerant humanists				
Low arrogance and ignorance							

Jan explains that he began writing the essay together with Mathilde and that it remained unfinished due to her death. He thanks Madeleine, Karel, and Tiene for their help in developing unfinished ideas. Their reflections primarily result in the essay taking a critical stance toward the ideal of freedom of both Rousseau and Condorcet, which places the individual first. The absolute *individual freedom* simply stands in the way of the freedom of all individuals,

according to Jan. And that's mainly because an individual imagines own freedom as a function of own awareness of own arrogance and ignorance. From this, he derives the role of the school and education. It is on the basis of this line of thought that he still finds Comenius' credo worthy of discussion. He then explains the basic philosophy of the schoolhouse to which he and Madeleine devoted a large part of their lives and whose model they improved with Karel and Tiene, and later also with Boudewijn and Gertrude. The schoolhouse is intended as a place that makes possible *freedom for all*, by allowing children to experience their differences as complementary, rather than in a hierarchical or exclusive way. The essay concludes with a plea for a general education that always takes into account the commonly available knowledge.

The final chapter also contains a call for the publication of good children's books to learn children to think complementary rather than hierarchically. In this regard, Jan further notes that what Johann Pestalozzi puts into practice is not necessarily progress as long as the pedagogue continues to insist that the poor must be taught to cope with their poverty. After all, this poverty is the result of the wealth of others, and learning to cope with it once again reduces itself to the hierarchy of haves versus have-nots. Jan is not really surprised by the news that Johann Pestalozzi is offered honorary citizenship by the French government this year. In the Federation of XIII Cantons, he is of course immediately accused of colluding with the enemy. In France, on the other hand, it is believed that he sympathises with those who stand up against the pervasive injustice. Moreover, there may well be many revolutionaries of the Third Estate who agree with Pestalozzi that there is also a class of poor people who are more easily controlled if they are made to feel happy. In his favour, one could argue that he does stand up against violence, whether it is revolutionary or not. Jan and Madeleine's pessimism regarding how people see and treat each other influences Jean-Jacques and Elise. Already in Leuven,

they experienced how much access to science is still tied to status and gender. This quickly led to both working more with adults than with children. The *Bruges Study Circle* they lead grew rapidly. Many participants transfer from existing chambers of rhetoric. Others sight out closer ties because they had previously entrusted their children's education to the couple. The study circle closely follows new developments in science. Among themselves, the participants make a great effort to avoid dogmatic thinking. Consequently, they soon began to discuss the doubts about whether one can prove God's existence and whether there is any point in seeking to prove it when one prioritises a society of people with diverse ideas, rather than a society where some are paternalistically tolerant of all those who have not yet perceived the (correct?) Light.

This time, it is Jan and Madeleine's friends who can quickly forward some news from Sluis about the Northern Netherlands. They confirm the rumour that the West India Company's charter wasn't renewed a year and a half ago. This indeed happened primarily for economic reasons, not because there was much thought given to abolishing slavery. According to information from Middelburg, this economic decline is primarily due to the fact that the slave trade is a liberalised trade without exclusivity rules. As a result, investors are seeking new profit opportunities, and it's even more unclear today what portion of a company's profits stems from the slave trade. It remains clear, however, that profits from the trade of goods from the colonies are largely the result of slave labor. Profits from goods produced in Europe are likewise largely a consequence of the ridiculously low wages manual labourers receive. Keeping poor people poor, just as elsewhere, is a necessity for all property owners, including the aristocracy and the Third Estate, who wish to expand their property.

The dilemma persists for Jan and Madeleine. They need to rely on other sources of income to keep the school running. So they decide

to review their investments once again. They permanently divest their few remaining interests in overseas trade and expand their stake in the local fishing company. Jan includes Jean-Jacques in their conversations so he understands the family's interests. The future is, of course, difficult to predict, and Jan doesn't rule out that the current turbulent period could put an end to many investments. Therefore, the parents and children agree to convert part of their holdings into gold and silver.

Meanwhile, the French occupiers are trying to tighten their grip on the Flemish, Hainaut, and Brabant regions. In fact, only the local *Jacobin Clubs* unconditionally support the French revolutionaries. The conservative Statists' sole goal was to keep the Austrians out of the Southern Netherlands, but the French rulers are even more fiercely opposed to church interference in state administration than the Austrians were. Jan and Madeleine don't always understand why the activists of the failed independent *Confederation of the United States of the Netherlands* drive to such alliances. The decree of December 15, 1792, practically obligated the cities to adopt all French revolutionary laws. It was clear that the French occupiers primarily see the conquered territories as a rich territory to plunder and use the proceeds to finance the revolution in the homeland. The constant looting of churches is a source of irritation among the local Catholic population. Attempts are made to negotiate, but the French leave little room for manoeuvre. As soon as the commissioners suspected resistance, they dissolve a city council without subsequently allowing a general election. This was the case in Leuven, Bruges, Ghent, Aalst, Ypres, and Antwerp, among others. Jean-Jacques and Mathilde hear from the Greysels family that many Catholics feel threatened when attending church. Church treasures also disappear from week to week. No one really knows what was plundered by the occupiers and what is hidden by members of the church community. Jean-Jacques is therefore somewhat surprised when he reads the text of Jan Baptist Verlooy, who has become the

leader since the death of Jan Vonck. In ‘*Are faith, freedom and property in danger?*’ Jan Baptist Verlooy explains that the new French government primarily wants to put away the wasteful nobility and clergy descended from the nobility. He argues that the state ultimately provides pastors with a better life and therefore confiscates the wealth of opulent bishops to avoid having the ordinary population to pay the wage bill. He explains that it ultimately comes down to political equality. ‘*There will subsequently be no nobles, no corporations of crafts, no masterships, no liveries, no dry orders, no States and so on: because these are all political inequalities*’. Jean-Jacques suspects that, as is often the case in the heat of battle, the truth lies with neither the Greysels nor Verlooy. There may be (good?) intentions, but the real known plunderers are still mainly ordinary, poorly paid, and ignorant soldiers acting in the name of greater good, without thereby remedying the abuses Verlooy refers to.

News then arrive from France that the king had been executed for treason. It is now abundantly clear that heads are very loose, and that this is true for everyone. A flurry of annexation decrees sweep through the cities during February and March, even after the Battle of Neerwinden on March 18th, which reversed the annexation of the Southern Netherlands. Jean-Jacques and Elise in Bruges, as well as Jan and Madeleine in Oostende naturally question the free will of the citizens preferring to be annexed rather than fall back into Austrian hands. How could such an annexation suddenly receive unanimous approval in Brussels, Mons, and even Ghent and Namur? Oostende approves the annexation decree on March 11th, but it is ultimately not implemented. On March 30th, the French leave rapidly the city through the Westpoort, heading for French Flanders...

Incidentally, the citizens of Oostende prefer to talk about something else than an annexation decree. Professor Lichtenstein published an article in the *Almanac of Goettingen* in which he proves the

miraculous healing power of seawater by explaining his own experience. The article benefits once more the sea baths and thus the economy of Ostend, as is already the case for several British cities. With this in mind, the citizens of Oostende ceremonially receive Knight De Wapenaer on April 5th. Jan and Madeleine find out the tree of liberty cap included, are reduced to ashes. Shortly thereafter, the guilds organize a large public festival. Madeleine writes to Jean-Jacques about this: despite all “*democratic ideas*” Verlooy is talking about people continuing to love lords and masters who offer festivities. On April 22nd, the city is packed with Englishmen. Some come to take a sea bath. But for the moment, they are mainly looking for accommodation for English soldiers. Not far from Keizerskaai, at the Witte Nonnenklooster (White Nunnery), stables for 900 horses are being built.

Live news from France is suddenly again hard to obtain. Jan and Madeleine are forced to rely on the testimonies of refugees and the writings of supporters of the French Revolution like Jan Verlooy. Gradually, the *National Convention* refuses to admit the *Girondin* delegates, and the number of beheaded opponents steadily increases. Besides, “opponent” is a passing concept, because someone guillotining today could be guillotined tomorrow. The English have plenty of cartoons about this ongoing French custom. The intensity of the revolution is directly proportional to the increasing terror, and everyone interprets what should be done as they please.

Parisian chocolatier Pauline Leon co-founded the *Society of Revolutionary Republican Citizens*. The group has a close connection with the *Enraged*, after Pauline marries its pioneer, Théophile Leclerc. One of her revolutionary demands is the right for women to bear arms. The regulations of the *Company* determines that its program is threefold: mutual instruction, study of the Constitution and laws of the Republic, and the defense of every individual who

is the victim of arbitrariness.

Madeleine finds the idea of mutual instruction interesting and tries to find out more about the women's association.

It's quite easy to claim that a certain part of the territory is out of control because of terror, often framed by law. For example, Captain Bonaparte is involved in suppressing uprisings in Avignon. He writes in response: *The Beaucaire Supper*, a pamphlet in which he defends *Jacobin* views. This benefits at short term his military career.

The free farmers are a new, emerging force, having had the opportunity since 1789 to abolish feudal law. In a sense, they embody the physiocratic ideas of state reform. They can also realize these ideas economically now that Le Chapelier's law bans corporations and the National General Assembly adopts freedom of individual enterprise as a general principle.

Jacobin leader Maximilien de Robespierre is making his voice heard again. As a deist, he believes that the far-reaching reforms aimed at separating church and state ultimately degenerated into an intolerant form of atheism. He considers this radical atheism a decadent aristocratic phenomenon, incompatible with the true nature of the people. He advocates for greater religious freedom throughout France, thus setting himself apart from the *Cult of Reason*. Robespierre also disagrees with Pauline Léon in her fight for the recognition of women's citizenship, which she initiated within the Jacobin Club. When he advocates for perfect justice and equality, he does mention the abolition of slavery and a progressive tax system. But the universal suffrage he defends is only for men, not for women.

The schoolhouse has barely reopened after the summer months when unrest is once again palpable in Ostend. The French are near Nieuwpoort. Will war overtake the city again? This time, the English and Austrians are anticipating the troop concentration.

They breach dikes, forcing the French army to withdraw. The polder farmers complain about the devastation in their fields.

Jan and Madeleine learned from an Austrian officer that on October 16th, the French guillotined the younger sister of the recently deceased Emperor Leopold II. She was also the aunt of Emperor Francis II and Governor Charles of Austria. But unfortunately, she was also the wife of Louis XVI, who had already been killed.

At the end of the same month, the French National Assembly decided to ban all women's associations. Women are not even allowed to meet together, despite the protests of Louis-Joseph Charlier, who declares: '*I do not know on what principle one can rely to deprive women of the right to assemble peacefully. Can you deprive them of this common right of all sentient beings, or do you perhaps deny that women are part of the human race?*' Madeleine has not had the time to find out more about the wishes and working methods of the *Society of Revolutionary Republican Citizens* or even to come into contact with the women of the now-banned association. For Jan and herself, it's a clear sign that the revolution is heading in the wrong direction if male arrogance so quickly regains the upper hand. Mutual instruction is more than necessary, they think, not only among women, but also among children from different classes. The schoolhouse would be a *Republican Children's Society* could be. Given that many parents of the children they work with today were also their students, such a project might find acceptance.

Jan and Madeleine are reading Jan Verlooy's essays more attentively than before. He never mentions their vision about mutual learning, of course, but he does resolutely defend universal suffrage. He writes that he cannot agree with the Statists and says that '*the Democrats or popularists on the contrary do not want any government except by choice, and for two or three years*'. You can, of course, ask the question of who is capable of making a conscious choice, and Jan and Madeleine see a possible answer to that question. Voters must have a solid education, be able to reason,

read, and write, and learn to live together with those who do not share their own opinions. Another idea for a *Republican Children's Society*. They find no clear indications in Verlooy as to how he intends to approach raising children for the right to vote. Yet, they do agree with his position that everyone, from the humble craftsman to the most wealthy or former nobleman, should have a voice, equal to everyone else's. However, Madeleine notes, this Brabander, who is trying to spread French ideology here, also fails to mention the role of women.

But adopting even good ideas from France is certainly not popular in Oostende at the moment. The French have sunk a cutter just off the coast, intending to hinder access for English ships and for trade in general. When an office opens shortly thereafter to accept patriotic donations for the benefit of the House of Austria, it becomes clear where local sympathies lie.

Furthermore, a large part of the population still distrusts the anticlericalism of the French. Recently, the Convention of Paris declared, for the umpteenth time, that it has the right to abolish the Catholic religion and replace it with the Cult of Reason. The Jacobin Club plays a significant role in this, although Robespierre once again distances himself from overly radical atheism. Incidentally, he finds more support when it becomes clear that the intention to turn Notre Dame into a temple of reason, to worship Reason, not the Christian God, is clearly misconceived. Some rumours claim that orgies even take place in the cathedral's aisles. Maximilien de Robespierre then declares that if God does not exist, he must be invented.

By early 1794, it was abundantly clear that the revolutionaries now governing the French State were determined to annex the Southern Netherlands at all costs, if only to increase their income. Jan and Madeleine once again observed the stark difference between those struggling daily to survive and those waging war in

the name of ideals of equality, which lack economic equality. For example, one of the new students from the fishing parish, surprised to be served meals on Keizerskaai with some fish or meat, tell them that daily fare at home consist of boiled potatoes mashed by their mother early in the morning, sometimes with a little sorrel, carrots, or peas, and, if possible, topped with onion sauce.

While Jan contemplates living conditions that could almost be called a slave's life, the evacuation of Austrians and Dutchmen staying in Oostende and Bruges continues. Madeleine writes a letter to their friends in Sluis, advising them to stay away for a while until the war violence that is now approaching subsides. Meanwhile, Elise announces that she, Jean-Jacques, and little Lodewijk are now leaving for Sluis. It's abundantly clear that the French intend to capture Bruges. Jean-Jacques and she are reluctant to take any risks after hearing stories about the poorly paid soldiers venting their frustration on the citizens of the occupied towns. Besides, it's better not to hear their six-year-old son proudly proclaiming everywhere he is *Louis the Free Warrior*. The teasing is often mean, and some other Louis, Lodewijks, and Ludwigs have already experienced it with stab wounds...

While on the streets one often hears chanting that '*le jour de gloire est arrivé*', it is usually deadly in nature, literally for many dissidents, and figuratively for most organisations. Naturally, the diplomatic and military institutions that served the beheaded king are out of the question, and anyone who formerly served such an institution is far from safe. This is the case, for example, for the Duke du Châtelet, former representative of the nobility in the Estates-General and, as a military superior, hated by his troops. After the king's death, he fled but quickly returned to secure his possessions. In doing so, he attempted to bribe officials to erase the evidence of his get-away and thus make himself credible. But he continues to lead a network of opponents of the revolution, and that lead to his death. Madeleine learned that he was beheaded a little

over a month ago.

Two days before the end of June, Jan tells Madeleine that he's just heard on the street that the alliance against France has been defeated at Fleurus. The French are rapidly approaching, and many Ostend residents are once again rushing to Zeeland. But this time, according to Jan, Zeeland isn't far enough to escape the war. There are persistent rumours that the French want to cut through to the Scheldt, not only to take over the Southern Netherlands but especially to keep the Scheldt and the ports of Antwerp and Ghent open. They send letters to friends and family with those leaving for Sluis, stating, among other things, that they will do everything they can to prevent soldiers from being billeted in their empty homes. Still, it would be better not to delay returning too long once they know Oostende has been captured. Naturally, they can't do much for Jean-Jacques and Elise, but those had already taken precautions by having friends move into their own home and school.

When the Austrians threw all the remaining ammunition in the city into the sea on June 30th, everyone knew what is to come. And on July 2nd, 15,000 French enter the city and have to be sheltered by the civilian population.

François Picard, one of the two officers who ends up with Jan and Madeleine, is from Lille. It soon becomes clear that his grandparents were part of Dieudonné and Mathilde's salon party. In the privacy of the house, and after a few tentative and very discreet conversations, the obligatory guest and host family come to the conclusion that they agree on many things, even on the fact that in France, the revolution is becoming more and more a caricature of itself, now that tomorrow those who executed yesterday will be executed.

Jan and Madeleine learn from François that Nicolas de Caritat, Marquis of Condorcet, had already been arrested in Clamart on March 27 and found dead two days later in Bourg-l'Égalité prison.

Persistent rumours persist that he committed suicide with a hidden poison he called '*le pain des frères, the monk's bread*'. But it is also said that he simply died of fright.

François continues somewhat sadly: "I come from a family where education was always more important than a military career. But in the last five years, for those of higher rank, there aren't many choices. You either try to survive as a military officer, or you're almost certainly pointed at and lynched by incited, ignorant people or reported to die by the guillotine. We saw in the Marquis someone who genuinely championed the political freedom of women. You tell me his educational proposals didn't go far enough, but I can assure you that your school project is perhaps unparalleled anywhere else, certainly not in France or the Southern Netherlands."

"I know we cherish a dream pursued by only a few," says Jan. "And it hasn't been easy here in Oostende either, keeping a group of sixty, sometimes almost eighty, children. Perhaps the fact that you don't see much of the conservative nobility here and that we maintain good relations with the leading parish priests is a plus. But getting back to Condorcet: I read a few years ago that he called Robespierre a kind of priest of the revolution, in a rather negative tone."

"I haven't read anything about this, but perhaps he had some kind of premonition at the time. A few months ago Robespierre was talking about the Supreme Being and the immortality of the soul. Now he's acting as a kind of high priest of the *Cult of the Supreme Being* counterpart of the *Cult of Reason*. It is his answer to what he calls extreme atheism. Christianity, he believes, has been completely corrupted, and therefore a rational religion must come: a Worship of the Supreme Being, a deistic state religion. The allegorical *Goddess of Reason* has an important role. Meanwhile, Catholic priests are still being forced to take an oath to the new order, an oath of submission to the Republic as well as one of

hatred of the monarchy. Since the beginning of this year, almost all French churches have been closed again.

“Unfortunately, it’s not just the churches that are closing,” Madeleine joins in. “Several academies have scaled back their operations or even stopped altogether. Even the Brussels Academy, which almost collapsed during that strange Van der Noot year that Vonck and Verlooy almost ripped their clothes, has now been closed down... And that’s rather odd, when so many people are so full of talk about Reason and Science.”

Their guest looks at her and remarks, “You’ll see that’s not all. A kind of all-encompassing intolerance, arrogance, and ignorance is forcing universities in France to close, claiming they’re all controlled by the Church or by enemies of the revolution.”

Jan brings up a thorny topic: “Can you tell us off the record, whether it is safe yet for our friends to return home?”

“It is difficult for me to look far into the future, because also off the record it’s very difficult to know today what will happen tomorrow. I know there are orders to take over the entire Flemish territory, including the States of Flanders, so it makes little difference for ordinary citizens to remain in Zeeland or here on the coast. A standing army will likely be established in the Brugse Vrije as a barrier against the English. For Oostende I fear the consequences will be what you already experienced before our arrival. The activities of the *Company of Trieste* and trade with the Indies will continue to decline here as the plan to make Antwerp the main port again is implemented. Oostende will remain a fishing port and possibly a local supply port. The English are too close...”

Two days later, François reports that it is becoming increasingly easier to arrest people even if they are suspected of having negative thoughts about the revolution: “A law was voted on 22 Priarial jaar II for the creation of the *Revolutionary Tribunal*. The few guarantees of defence the accused still had disappear with this. In my view, the tribunal is a means of condemning aristocrats and property-owning

people in the same arbitrary manner as the poor, by depriving them of anything that might still have given them some possibility of protection. In my view, that kind of equality is not progress for justice, but a step backward. Instead of giving the poor the means to defend themselves, means are taken away from those who have them, so that they can no longer make themselves heard. Incidentally, Georges Couthon, who collaborated on this project, is said to have declared that '*The delay in punishing enemies of the fatherland should be limited to recognising that they are such; it is not so much a matter of punishing them as of destroying them... It is not a matter of setting a few examples, but of exterminating the implacable satellites of tyranny, or else perishing along with the Republic.*' That seems to me a peculiar way of defending liberty and fraternity.

Gradually, the Ostend residents return from the States of Flanders to find that the land forces, just like the maritime commissioners, were thorough in their requisitioning of goods and foodstuffs. General Moreau immediately requisitions all the binoculars and Ferraris maps. Merchants and shopkeepers are subsequently ordered to surrender all copper, iron, lead, tin, sulfur, saltpetre, potash, talcum powder, and leather. Even more devastating is the daily provision of 18,000 pounds of bread to the garrison, which placed a significant burden on the civilian population. Two weeks later, the occupying army requisitions 300 kettles and all available coal. The deadlines are short. For example, on July 21, within 24 hours, 1,200 pounds of candles, 6,000 pounds of cheese, 10 barrels of linseed oil, 400 pounds of rice, 130 barrels of brandy, 108 cases of tobacco, and 54 cases of soap must be available.

"Just understand," Karel says during their first conversation after he and Tiene returned to Oostende. "We're racked with the demands of the occupying army, but everyone here is celebrating. Yesterday there was a big party in the main square, and another liberty tree was planted. And the Austrian double-headed eagle has disappeared

from the fishermen's quay. Ignorance or fear?" he asks, glancing askance at François.

He answers: "Perhaps also fear. Although we have no direct orders to scrutinise the civilian population, there may be spies from the *Revolutionary Tribunal* among us. I think, Karel, that in the coming months, perhaps years, this army of arrogant controllers will be in charge."

Just two weeks later, François arrives with great news from Paris: Maximilien de Robespierre himself did not survive the revolutionary tribunal or a modification thereof and has now been guillotined. Much more could be written later about this figure who long opposed the death penalty, later accepted its application, only to succumb to it himself, killed and reviled by those who admired him yesterday. Even Jan Verlooy cannot resist writing on 19 Thermidor Year II about "*The betrayal of the infamous Robespierre*" whereby he clearly distances himself from this Rousseau follower.

But the shirt is closer than the skirt, and petty concerns take over. Tiene and Madeleine confront François about the ongoing requisitioning of supplies for the French army. It never ends: this month, 120,000 pounds of granulated sugar, all the lantern irons, 30 barrels of brandy and 28 barrels of gin, 10,000 pairs of shoes and stockings, canvas, 40,000 pounds of rice, 60,000 pounds of tobacco—and that's just a small part of the list—will be transferred from the Ostend merchants to the garrisons. Moreover, the tolls from the gate on the road to Torhout now go directly to the French treasury. François can only say that soldiers are obligated to carry out their orders.

Between a requisition of cheese and one of binoculars, a decimal division of the day is introduced in September. It currently consists of ten hours of one hundred minutes, each divided into one hundred seconds. Time seems to pass more slowly for those accustomed to the Babylonian division since ancient times. A few months later, Paris will abandon the project. However, the law for

decimal weights and measures will remain in effect, which greatly facilitates trade across city and state borders.

By the end of 1794, the French occupiers have a firm grip on the Southern Netherlands. Oostende is divided into 15 parishes. As in other cities, all associations are dissolved and all their assets seized. There is only one exception: the commissioners of the Republic ordered the *Cercle Littéraire* continue to exist. In their recommendation, they classify the organisation as necessary. Jan and Madeleine are unsure what to make of this. Do the commissioners see the literary circle as a breeding ground for revolutionary ideas? Or is it simply an easily infiltrated group, given that French is the lingua franca? At their home, parallel meetings are occasionally held in Flemish which François also attends, now that he already knows a fair amount of the local language.

At such a meeting, Tiene and Gertrude ask whether François had already heard about Marie-Anne Pierette Paulze.

“I only know that she married Antoine Lavoisier as a child mother about twenty years ago and always worked with him, even when she had a lover.”

“‘Worked with him’ is an interesting way of putting things,” Gertrude notes somewhat ironically. “I would rather say that Antoine needed her because she speaks English and translated his correspondence with British colleagues. She played a role in spreading the phlogiston theory, but also in debunking it after Antoine Lavoisier emphasised the importance of the *air vital* demonstrated in the combustion of substances.”

“And she continued the tradition of other French women of means,” says Madeleine. “She provided the illustrations in her husband’s recently published work *Elementary treatise on chemistry* and also kept a salon.”

“She was imprisoned after the execution of her father and Antoine,” Jan continues. “If I understand correctly, Antoine was put to death

because he worked with the *General Farm* as a tax collector. But he developed the *assignat* with Condorcet long before the Revolution.” François now says hesitantly: “If you tell anyone about this, I’ll be hanged. But I can tell you that Lavoisier was imprisoned on the basis of probably false accusations by Marat in *l’Ami du Peuple*. At the revolutionary tribunal, the ignorant but very arrogant Jean-Baptiste Coffinhal declared: ‘*The Republic needs no scientists or chemists; the validity of law cannot be suspended*’ The day after his beheading, Louis de Lagrange was heard to declare: ‘*It took them a moment to drop this head perhaps a hundred years won’t be enough to produce a likely one*’ Don’t believe I condone these acts of terror. I watch them with dismay. Truly, this revolution has already done more harm than good to the people in general, and I would even say, to ordinary people in particular. We are at the mercy of arrogant, ignorant, and unscrupulous people who only crave their own power.”

“That’s harsh, what you’re saying, François,” Karel remarks. “Unfortunately, there’s evidence to suggest you’re right. Ignorance based on prejudice seems to crop up everywhere. Imagine if I learned in Sluis that in several places, women engaged in scientific work are forbidden to delve into Carolus Linnaeus’ system for classifying plants. This classification is based on sexual properties and reproduction, and according to the prohibitive men such knowledge would only lead women to immoral thoughts. Women and especially mothers must not be defiled by this, say the whore-minded ignorant moralists.”

There’s a brief laugh at Karel’s fervent pronouncement. “Not all arrogant men are therefore whoremongers,” Boudewijn laughs, “although I do understand your sharp remark. It’s enough to discourage you... But here and there, there’s hope. I recently heard that Caroline Herschel, who moved from Hanover to Bath in Great Britain is the first woman receiving since 1787 a small annual salary from the Court as an astronomer for her cometary research.

Some even say she might publish with the Royal Society. I'm very curious."

"We will continue to incorporate these kinds of stories and examples into our curriculum," says Jan. "It's absolutely essential that we continue to teach children that peace is better than war, except for a small group of arrogant leaders and traders, and that with knowledge and education, everyone can contribute to expanding human knowledge."

And so 1794 turns into 1795, with more fear than joy blowing over from France. In Oostende, all shoemakers of the guild are forced to work for the Republic until they had finished 300,000 pairs of shoes.

In Brussels, Verlooy re-enters the political arena as soon as the French capture the city. He is promoted, first to alderman, and then to mayor, on the 1st Floréal of Year III. But a few weeks later, he is forced to resign for health reasons.

Meanwhile, the nobility of the Northern Netherlands suffer blows. William V flees to England, and the Batavian Republic is proclaimed. A few days later, representatives of the people are appointed everywhere, from the States of Flanders to Holland and even Friesland. When France takes over the territory below the Scheldt, thus outside the Batavian Republic, the friends from Sluis declare that, for once, there is no land border between Ostend and themselves.

Republican ideas are slowly gaining traction in the overseas colonies of the Northern Netherlands. The announced release of slaves from the French West Indies is commented. This impresses Tula, a slave with a strong personality in Curaçao. Some time later, our friends of Oostende would hear about him.

In Europe, the upper classes are talking about Beethoven giving piano concertos in Vienna and publishing his first works. And male-dominated Europe continues to virtually exclude women from

education and training. But Gertrude tells the story of Martha McThier, a friend of Elizabeth Hamilton, who, following in the footsteps of David Manson, started a small school for poor girls in Belfast. Although Boudewijn and Gertrude didn't fly to Belfast by balloon, they do stay regularly informed about what's happening thanks to their friend who occasionally stops there.

"It is clear," says Boudewijn, "that David Manson has followers who also put away the rod and have the children study in working pairs."

"And Martha McThier is one of those followers," Gertrude continues. "Several of her acquaintances attended Manson's school, and her conversations with them led her to start her own school, exclusively for poor girls."

"What I heard about her," says Madeleine, "is that she draws inspiration from writers like Mary Wollstonecraft, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Ann Radcliffe and Elizabeth Hamilton."

Gertrude says enthusiastically: "A couple of years ago, Martha McThier wrote she boasts that her little girls can do more than just babble about the New Testament and laboriously decipher texts, and that they read so well that they actually enjoy it."

"Her success led her, together with Lady Skeffington, to propose a project to the city this year to set up a residential school for girls, which would also provide meals and clothing," says Boudewijn. "And the reaction from arrogant men was not long in coming. Look, here in the *Northern Star*, publish some of those specimens under the name 'the Bucks', literally the male rabbit or also the roe deer: '*We love girls educated above their rank, and their heads filled with ideas beyond their means. We by experience, know the consequence - we shall always have fresh supplies from your excellent seminary*'".

"So you could say we're dealing with a specimen here, that is, an arrogant species of men," laughs Madeleine. "I'm curious to see if Martha McThier will succeed in her plan."

In Curaçao, August of this year was a sad month for those seeking to free themselves from slavery. Thanks to the written testimony of Father Jacobus Schink, the story reached Europe only a few years later. Far from where the bourgeoisie and merchants enriched themselves thanks to the labor of those still enslaved as Black people, the charismatic Tula refused to work that day. According to the story, it was August 17th. Along with about fifty fellow slaves, he went to explain to their owner that they had the right to plead their freedom, in light of the events in France and the Batavian Republic, where the French government had abolished slavery on February 4th of the previous year. Their owner, Van Utrecht, declared himself incompetent and ordered Tula to present the case in Willemstad. He departed with his group and passing through other plantations he freed captured slaves. Eventually some two thousand of them faced the Colonial Council. The Council deployed negotiators with the intention of returning the slaves to the plantations. Father Schink claims that Tula, who was addressed as “captain”, said he did not wish to harm anyone, but wanted the freedom of all Black people, since the French Black people were already free, The Netherlands had been occupied by the French and therefore the Dutch Black people must also be freed. According to Father Schink, Tula further stated: *‘Father, aren’t all humans descended from Adam and Eve? Did I do wrong by freeing 22 of my brothers from the chains that were wrongfully placed upon them? Ah, Father, one takes more care of an animal: if an animal breaks a leg, it is healed.’* And he ends his argument by repeating: *‘We desire nothing but our freedom’.* But the Dutch plantation owners thought differently. With the help of the Colonial Council’s army, a bloody persecution of the Curaçao slaves followed. Tula was nicknamed Rigaud, after André Rigaud, leader of the slave revolt in San Domingo.

It’s possible that the fate of one single white man, the schoolmaster Sabel, sealed the fate of all the Black slaves who fought for their

freedom. Just as the slaves were beginning their journey to Willemstad, Sabel had fled his plantation but returned to retrieve some of his belongings. In doing so, he fell into the hands of rebellious slaves who were not as gentle as he had come to expect from the Black population. He was abused and eventually shot to end his suffering.

Tula understands that the whites are driven by a desire for revenge and hides in uninhabited territory. Eventually, a fellow rebel betrays him and, in exchange for payment, points out his hiding place. The white rulers then allow Tula to be tortured until he falsely declares his intention to murder all the whites on the island. This gives the Colonial Council the justification to sentence Tula to death and execute him. Here, it is not ignorance that causes arrogant rulers to disregard laws, but solely profit. Ultimately, Tula's initiative, despite the gruesome manner in which the Colonial Council murdered him on false charges, achieved minimal results. In November 1795, a new law came into effect, stipulating Sunday as a holiday, establishing maximum working hours, and specifying the food and clothing to be provided to the slaves. Although the law was strictly enforced, this did not mean the end of slavery.

Closer to home, the constant skirmishes between the English and the French, especially at sea and in the Scheldt estuary, are making the coastal population uneasy in the departments of Leie and Scheldt, as the French have renamed the parts of the country that formerly made up Flanders.

The Republican desire to universalize the separation of Church and State also continues to cause riots. The decree demands the removal of all external signs during religious services and all ceremonies. Church processions, the ringing of bells, and the wearing of ecclesiastical vestments are prohibited. This increases tension between Catholics and the rest of the population.

In France at the time, the Marquis de Condorcet had innovative ideas for education. He emphasised that education should be organised by the government. Proposals such as scholarships, free education, and mixed schools (based on gender, origin, and class) enjoyed widespread support, but were not implemented during his lifetime, not even shortly after the French Revolution. No one was willing to finance these measures. After his death, no one spoke publicly about them.

Nothing is done to make people less ignorant and more educated to interact with each other through education, training or knowledge transfer.

Both the Keizerskaai school and Jean-Jacques and Elise's Bruges Study Circle are facing challenges. Mixed and non-religious education is permitted, but there are frequent comments from commissioners who are unwilling to bring together children of different backgrounds or classes and who want to test the "revolutionary nature" of such initiatives.

All in all, the ongoing political unrest and its impact on local businesses are causing a decline in school attendance. Both in the former Flanders and in Staats-Vlaanderen, people complain about the systematic absence of children of the poor. The most needy parents are reluctant to send their children to school. The government of the Batavian Republic is considering ending free education. There are many stories, such as that of a student of Jan's colleague who received support for his studies. He apprenticed with a craftsman who also allowed him to attend school. The boy himself skipped school. When later urged to attend, the boss declared that he could no longer spare him in the business. It's one example among others, writes Jan's friend, that not all is well in the Department of the Scheldt either. The rising cost of living is forcing children, parents, and bosses alike to abandon school. It's a spiral. The army of the ignorant is rapidly increasing and is once again subjected to the arrogance of old and new owners.

Ironically, this decline is especially true now that learning to read is becoming somewhat less difficult in schools that are adopting the *Haneboek*. This book now includes, after a short introduction introducing the letters, only one syllable-based exercise, followed by reading and spelling exercises using meaningful words and sentences. Most schoolmasters are finally becoming more open to textbooks that are considered innovative. Bible stories remain popular, and among patriotic schoolmasters, in addition to the little-used *Newly Invented A.B.C. Book* by Kornelis de Wit, also *The Fatherland A-B Book for Dutch Youth* of Jan Hendrik Swildens has its followers. But this doesn't mean that Rousseau's ideas are popular in the departments of the Scheldt and the Scheldt estuary. The limited purchase of books by Willem Perponcher Sedlinsky clearly demonstrates this. However, the price of the books and the author's background may also have played a role. In any case, there is a noticeable aversion to Rousseau-an ideas about a liberal education and about nature and freedom. These are too far removed from what was taught in the poor schools of the recent past.

Despite the temporary decline in the school population, the departments that covered what used to be Flanders have approximately one schoolteacher per 800 inhabitants. New regulations, which may vary locally, are being introduced regarding what schoolteachers may or may not have as a secondary occupation. Karel believes this is partly due to the fact that a social debate is now developing in which education is given a more prominent place. It is becoming increasingly clear that improving schools is a key factor for bringing in change. This improvement must be stimulated by the secular government. Many believe that the Church should only play a supporting role. Even schoolteachers who do not wish to be too explicit about the separation of church and state often hint that perceived improvements are often the work of the government, not the church.

Karel and Tiene recall what they observed when they were in Sluis some time ago. Three groups of schoolmasters were observed. First and foremost, there were Dutch and French schoolmasters and teachers at the Latin schools. They began working for the government and received their appointments through it. Then there were Dutch and French schoolmasters and French female teachers, who ran schools with government permission but received no financial support. Finally, there were schoolmasters employed by a charitable institution.

Together they formed the “educational market” for educating children. Regulation of this market was in the hands of parents and guardians, the government, and, in rural areas, also the church. Schoolmasters from the Southern Netherlands were rather rare.

In the Southern Netherlands, both before and after the French annexation, the annual salaries of schoolmasters fluctuated less than those of private teachers. Elise’s parents knew that such teachers in Leuven could earn from just under 100 guilders to over 500. The annual salary of schoolmasters in the present-day Ourthe department fluctuated between 350 and 420 guilders, often less than 20 years ago.

François, in turn, explains that the central government plans to gain more control over education and wants a general model, perhaps with general school laws. The changes underway extend beyond education.

Gradually, a new class of rulers seems to be establishing itself. It appears that in the coming decades, the poor will no longer be enslaved by those who own land, but by those who wield power, not in the name of God, but in the name of the people

It is December 31, 1795, or 10 Nivôse of the year IV. 31 Newnamehns 117.95.



*End of book 04*

# A strange letter

Dear Pascal

We are taking advantage of small glitches in the space-time continuum to allow you to become a saga of educators, pedagogues, and anthropagogues. The saga was first published in 122.15 (Holocene calendar), which corresponds to the year 2215 according to the calendar you use in the 21st century.

The dynasty spans 20 generations, from 1630 to 2222 in your era.

When we studied your century in preparation for the work, we found your name and your interest in dialogical learning. That is why we kindly ask you to further disseminate the documents we send whenever we get the chance.

You can rest assured. The glitch in the continuum will have no impact on the past or future of living people. Only documents can be sent through it.

On behalf of the team of writers,

Maria Liber



<sup>1</sup> Later the constellation will be known as Messier 81.

<sup>2</sup> Ich habe immer die wichtigste Armenanstalt in der Auferziehung der Waisen geglaubt. Der Arme ist mehrenteils arm, weil er zur Erwerbung seiner Bedürfnisse nicht aufgezogen ist. Man sollte hier die Quelle stopfen. Der Endzweck in der Auferziehung der Armen ist, neben der allgemeinen Auferziehnng des Menschen, in seinem Zustande zu suchen. Der Arme muß zur Armut auferzogen werden. Und hier ist der Brüfungsgnoten, ob eine solche Anstalt wirklich gut sei. Die Auferziehung des Armen fordert tiefe, genaue Kenntnis der eigentlichen Bedürfnisse, Hemmungen und Lagen der Armut, Kenntnis des Details der wahrscheinlichen Lage ihrer künftigen Tage. Denn es ist in alleweg Wahrheit, daß jeder Stand des Menschen seine Tugend vorzüglich in den Einschränkungen. Hemmungen und Beschwerlichkeiten seiner ältern Tage üben soll, und ich glaube, das Wesentliche der Lehrzeit eines jeden Berufes bestehe in den Übungen der Beschwerlichkeiten desselben, in der Geduld und Überwindung aller Wünsche, die an einer fortgehenden, ununterbrochenen Tätigkeit in künstigen Hauptpflichten hindern würden.

<sup>3</sup> Der Menschenfreund muß hinabsteigen in die unterste Hütte des Elends, muß den Armen in seiner dunklen Stube, seine Frau in der Küche voll Rauch und sein Kind am fast unmöglichen Tagewerk sehen. Wenn diese Kinder so bei armen Eltern, so in armen Hütten lebten, so würden sie notwendig an alle diese Einschränkungen so gewöhnt, daß sie ihnen nicht beschwerlich sein würden, sie würden unter diesen Beschwerlichkeiten ruhig und glücklich leben können. Eine gute Auferziehungsanstalt soll ihnen diese Ruhe, diese Zufriedenheit nicht rauben. Und das würde geschehen, wenn der Menschenfreund, der arme Kinder auferziehen will, nicht genügsame Kenntnisse der Armut und ihrer Hilfsmittel hat.

<sup>4</sup> Seine Auferziehungsstube soll seiner künftigen Wohnstube soviel möglich gleich sein. Mir schauert vor dem Elende der Unglücklichen, die durch unweise Wohltätigkeit verloren gehen, wenn ich sie unter der Last der unbekannten Armut in Thränen arbeiten, in Thränen ihr Brot essen, wenn ich sie wie kränkelnde Kinder ihr Leben durchserben sehe. Wahrlich, auch in meinem Herzen brennt innige Wärme. Liebe zum Wohl, zum größten möglichen Wohl dieser Verlassenen; aber ich sehe es nur in der äußersten Angewöhnung der strengsten Einschränkungen, in der angelegtesten Ausbildung, der tätigsten Industrie, verknüpft mit ernsten, anhaltenden Übungen in allen Arten von Beschwerlichkeiten der im Lande üblichen Unterhaltungswege der Armut.